

K.P.P. London

The Weekly Miscellany

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LETTER

TO THE

AUTHOR

OF THE

Weekly Miscellany.

WHEREIN

His Notion of a State of **ABSOLUTE**
REPROBATION, or a judicial and unalterable Incapacity of Repentance is refuted; and Dr. **LUCAS**'s Preservative against Despair vindicated from the Exceptions of that Writer.

To which are added,

The Weekly Miscellanies of the Third and Tenth of
March last, that gave Occasion to this Letter.

L O N D O N :

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LETTER

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OF THE

Weekly Miscellany

W. H. R. E. I. N.

The Nation of a State of Affairs
Represented as a national and
terrible instance of the
and Dr. Lucas's Preservative
has been vindicated from the
of that Nation

To which are added

The Weekly Miscellany of the Third and Fourth
Issues of the Year 1840

LONDON

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Advertisement.

THE Weekly Miscellanies, *that gave Occasion to this Letter, are here added at the End; because they are reprinted with no other View, but to furnish every Reader with an Opportunity of consulting them occasionally, as often as he shall judge it necessary to verify the Passages cited from them; and by this means prevent his entertaining any ill Opinion, as if the least Injustice was designed to be done that Writer. But if this Piece should fall into the Hands of any one who has*

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not yet perused those Papers, it would not perhaps be amiss, tho' here last in order, to give them the first place in his reading, that he may be the better able to judge of the Nature of the Controversy now before him.

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TO THE
AUTHOR
OF THE
Weekly MISCELLANY.

SIR,

THOUGH I have long heard of your *Paper*, as professedly undertaken for the sake of promoting Religion and Virtue, and thought the Design, if judiciously managed, might prove a Benefit to the Publick; yet having never heard any great Commendation of your Performances, and not meeting with them commonly in my way, I can't pretend

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rend I have ever been your constant Reader. And, indeed, to confess the Truth to you freely, I don't certainly remember that I have read more than *one* of your *Papers* quite thro', since they first began to be published, till the last Week, when a Gentleman happening accidentally to pull two of your *Miscellanies* out of his Pocket, in Company, where I was upon a Visit, and perceiving they were *occasion'd* by a *History of the Behaviour of an Atheist on his Death-bed*, and likewise discovering in some *Places* Dr. *Lucas's* Name mentioned, who I remember'd had written what I thought a good *Preservative against Despair*; I was tempted, by the Importance of the Subject, to give them a Perusal. But alas! how was I disappointed? When instead of the useful Observations I expected, upon a Subject that afforded so much room for them, I met with little else but an Attempt to assert a Notion, false in itself, and pernicious in its Consequences; together with such a severe Censure upon the *Work* above-mentioned, as must naturally tend to lessen the Good I believe it capable of doing.

The Question you undertake to treat of, is, *Whether there can be any such case in this Life, as a State of absolute Reprobation, or judicial and final Obduration; an unalterable Incapacity of Repentance, and consequently of Pardon.*

Pardon. But by the whole drift of your Arguments, it appears that your Design was to shew that there not only *can* be such a State in the Nature of Things, but that there is likewise all the Appearance in the World, to induce us to believe, there *actually* have been many Examples of Men under such an *Incapacity*; and by consequence, that there may *probably* be many more hereafter, tho' we can have no sufficient Reason before Death to pronounce this is the Case of any *particular* Person. This is what I call a false and pernicious Notion, and esteem it liable to the very worst Uses that can be made of any Doctrine. But tho' I know the contrary Opinion to be true, and think myself able to shew it is so, yet because I have reason to believe this has been already done by Dr. *Lucas*, in his *Preservative*, much better than I can pretend to do it again; it is not my Intention to aim at any thing farther in the following *Sheets*, than what may be sufficient to confute the Arguments you produce for your Side of the Question, and to vindicate that *Work* from the frivolous Exceptions you have made to it.

But because there seems to be something of Inconsistency in the Design I have ascribed to you, of endeavouring to shew, that we may have reason to believe of many *particular* Persons who have died impenitent,

that they were in *this Life* under a judicial Incapacity of Repentance, and yet that we can't have sufficient Reason to pronounce as much of any *particular Person living*; it may be proper, before I proceed to consider your *Arguments*, to spend a little time in justifying myself from having made a false Representation of your *Opinion*.

That you think we may have reason to believe of many *particular Persons* who died impenitent, that they were in *this Life* under a *judicial Incapacity of Repentance*, appears evidently from your telling us, that your Notion is supported by *many glaring Facts*. *History* (say you) *has recorded some, and our own Times have supplied us with others, that carried with them all possible Appearance of Reality*. And then you go on to produce two Instances of these *glaring Facts*, as you call them; one in the Person of that *unhappy Gentleman* that gave the Occasion to your writing in defence of the Notion you have now asserted, who, *as far as his Friends could judge of him, or he could judge of himself, was judicially struck with a Sense of his Condition*, viz. his unalterable Incapacity of Repentance. Your other Instance is *that of Bunworth, a bloody Villain, who suffer'd at Kingston with Bluet*, of whom you judge in the same manner, and for the same Reason. Here then in these Instances, and in all the other *glaring Facts*

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you refer to, you apply your general Doctrine to *particular Persons*; and yet you tell us in exprefs Words, that *God has not afforded us any Criterions whereby we can pronounce with Certainty upon any particular Person, that he is in that State.* Now if *God* has not afforded us any Rules or Marks to found our Judgment upon, I would fain know *from whence* it was you got *those* that enabled you to form yours, of the *particular Persons* before mention'd. Their dying impenitent could not be of any weight towards determining you in this Point; since you cannot but own, that Abundance of Persons have died impenitent, who were under no *judicial and unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*: And yet, besides *this* of an impenitent End, there does not appear to have been any other *Criterions* for you to proceed upon, more than the long Infidelity of the one, and the notorious ill Life of the other, together with their own Reflections upon themselves. But if these be Marks sufficient to induce us to abandon *all*, upon whom they are found, to their own Despair, (*a Thought that is enough to make a Man tremble while he writes*) What will become of so many Parts of your *Papers*, as seem to have been designed to persuade us to the contrary? Here then certainly must be an Inconsistency in your Notion one way or other; from whence I am shrewdly tempted to

conclude, it must be impossible for you to bring any Arguments capable of proving it. However, to do you Justice, I will readily own you have shewn great Skill in finding out some which suit your Notion so exactly, that they are not one jot less full of Inconsistency than the Hypothesis they were intended to serve.

You begin with telling us, that *this is a Point which cannot be determined by Reason*; and yet you afterwards make a sort of Concession, that it can't be maintain'd by *Scripture* neither. For in answer to Dr. Lucas's Promise of being ready (as you tell us) to *give up his Opinion, if any one could produce a plain Text* in favour of the State you now contend for; instead of producing such a *Text*, you think it enough to oppose another Promise, *that you will no longer contend for it, if any one can produce a plain Text against it*. Now be pleas'd to observe, that I do not build your Concession *here*, only upon your not producing a plain *Text*, when you had this Challenge for it, or upon your not giving us any Reason why you did not, as for Example, that you had done it before, or would do it hereafter; something of which sort most People would have expected. But *that* from which I plainly infer, you knew you had none such to produce, is the Promise you are pleas'd to lay
your-

yourself under, of contending for your Notion no longer, if any one can produce a plain Text against it. For if you had known of but one single plain Text on your side of the Question, it might have served well enough to balance with one against it, and so you might have kept to your Point still, but for your Promise, till it should be determined which Text weighed heaviest.

And you must not think to come off here, with saying you promis'd no more than Dr. Lucas did before you; and consequently that he was as conscious of the Weakness of his Side of the Question, as you of yours; because the Comparison will by no means hold. He had before abundantly proved the Truth of his Doctrine, from such plain Offers of *Grace and Mercy in the Scripture* to all Sinners, as left no room for any farther Doubts; and being certain there was no plain Text to be found against it, he might well be allowed to use such an Expression, to shew the Confidence he had, that his Adversaries would never be able to produce one; especially after he had given such full Answers, as I believe he did, to every thing that had been usually urged to that purpose. Whereas you had so indifferent an Opinion yourself of the slight Attempt you made to draw a Proof of your Notion from *Scripture*, that you own'd you rather chose to proceed in another Method of

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Proof,

Proof, tho' not the common one, than rest your Cause upon the Interpretation of particular Passages of Scripture, which might be controverted. What Method you could proceed in, and that impossible to be controverted, for the proving a Point, which can neither be determined by Reason, nor yet maintain'd by particular Passages of Scripture, must undoubtedly be so very new and uncommon, that I cannot but fancy my Reader driven almost to his Wit's end to conjecture what it should be.

But I would not have him despair too soon; for notwithstanding all these discouraging Appearances, he will find such heavy Arguments offer'd in Defence of it, as can't be outweigh'd by any thing else, but Texts that are very plain indeed, and incapable of any other Construction. This, I confess, will be home to the purpose; but then for the Life of me, I can't be able to see why you are so very modest as to acknowledge, your Notion can't be determined by Reason, since after this rate, it seems to bid as likely for it, as most Points can. For I presume there are but few Points so extremely clear and certain from Reason, as that you would be willing to contend for them long, after they were found so directly contrary to Scripture, as to be liable to be confuted by a Text so very plain indeed, as to be incapable of any other Construction.

But

But it is time to take a View of your Arguments, and then we shall see whether they are as strong as you take them to be. And first, you bid us begin with considering whether such a State *be agreeable to our natural Notions of God, and his Attributes.* A right Beginning enough; only let me tell you a word in your Ear, that many a one who had begun here, wou'd have grown so weary with his Work at the Beginning, that he wou'd never have been able to have got to his Ending. But tho' I find you are not to be so soon tired as another Man, yet methinks you have made such haste to get over your Business, that you seem to have apprehended some Danger of what might possibly happen, or else you would never have left your Work so rough and unfinished behind you. Really, Sir, the Way you have here cut out for your Reader to follow you in, lies so very broken and uneven, that I cannot possibly gallop thro' it; but must humbly intreat you, to allow me so much Indulgence, as to suffer me to look before I leap.

The first Rub I meet with, and *that* big enough to make a Man stumble at the very Entrance, if he did not take care, is, your *Sufficient Means of Conviction and Reformation.* I wish I could tell what those Words are design'd for. When I consider the natural

tural Signification of them, and find you immediately after talking of *strict Justice*; and again somewhat *lower* down, reasoning from God's Proceedings with the *beathen* World, I am tempted to think you meant no more than *barely* sufficient Means. But then, on the other hand, when I consider that you lay it down as certain, that to affirm we have any Right to expect more than *sufficient* Means, is all one as to say, *that it is unjust in God, to put us into a State of Trial and Probation at all*; and find you proving *this* by the Reason that follows; *For if God be obliged to give us more than sufficient Means of Conviction and Reformation, in a rational Way, and consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will, he must be obliged to grant such a Degree of Evidence, as will necessarily enforce Faith, and such a Degree of Grace as will compel Men to be good*: When, I say, I consider all *this*, together with the Supposition you make in your second *Paper*, of some Persons *having rejected the strongest Reasons for believing Christianity, and resisted the strongest Assistances from the Holy Ghost, they can have given them*, I immediately change my Mind again, and quitting my former Opinion, I am ready to conclude, that tho' the Words do not express so much, yet you intended we should understand by *sufficient* Means, no less than *all* the Means of every Kind, that can be employed by a wise and good

good Being for our Conviction and Reformation, consistent with the Nature of that Liberty he has bestow'd on Man in this State, and of those Rewards and Punishments he designs to distribute in another. These Senses you see are widely different, and yet I have no Guide to direct me in this great Uncertainty, which of them I should follow ; and therefore for fear you should (like some other Disputants I have known) mean sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, as it suited your Turn, I think it the safest, tho' somewhat the longer Method, to examine *both* of em ; by which it will appear that *neither* can do you any Service, towards proving the State you contend for, *agreeable to our natural Notions of God and his Attributes.*

First, to begin with supposing that by *sufficient* Means you intended only such as are *barely* sufficient, I will acknowledge that in *strict Justice*, God is not obliged to give us more to make us *accountable* to him for our Conduct, or to render us liable to some *Degree* of Punishment ; so that if this be all you design'd this Argument for, I have no Objection to it ; only I don't see which way it can be applied to the *Point* in Question. For if you would have us *infer* from hence (which to do you right, you have said nothing of your self) that those who are vouchsafed no higher Means of Conviction and

and Reformation, than such as are *barely* sufficient, if they improve them to the best Advantage, may for want of their having done so, be sentenced to suffer in another World, Punishments extremely intense in their Nature, and eternal in their Duration, without Intermission, and without End, (as Hell is commonly describ'd) *This* is far from being so clear as you may imagine, because *here* would be no Proportion observed between the Punishment and the Crime, which *strict Justice* seems to require. What Thoughts should we be apt to entertain of the Justice of any human Magistrate, who should be so extremely severe as to punish the Neglect or Abuse of the smallest Favour he could bestow, with the longest and greatest Torments he was able to inflict? And if there be no comparing Human with Divine Justice, so as to be able to draw any Consequence from the one to the other, I own I shall be much at a loss to form any Notion of Justice in God at all, or to say what it *does*, or does *not* require.

But let this be as it will ; yet what room is there to charge your Adversaries with that Absurdity you pretend to pinch them with? Why must it follow, that if God be obliged to give us more than *barely* sufficient Means of Conviction and Reformation, *he must be obliged to grant such a Degree of*

of Evidence as will necessarily enforce Faith, and such a Degree of Grace as will compel Men to be good? Are there no possible intermediate Degrees between the one and the other? Nay, are not a vast Variety of intermediate Degrees *actually* afforded to different Persons? I am sure you have talked too much *below* about the *Heathens*, *Jews*, and *Christians*, to have forgot already what Answers must be made to these Questions.

And after all, to what Purpose is this pother about *strict Justice*? Should I yield you up whatever you may be pleased to say of it, would you be got one Step the nearer to your Conclusion? For is every thing that is consistent with *strict Justice*, agreeable to our *natural Notions of God*? This cannot be said, unless it could be proved that we have no *natural* Notions of his Goodness. Whereas it is evident that our *Notions* of the Divine Goodness are *prior*, and consequently in some sort more *natural* than those we afterwards form of his *Justice*. For we can't be so much as inwardly conscious of our own Being, or open our Eyes ever so little to look abroad upon the outward Fabrick of the World, and observe the abundant Provision which God has made for the well-being of all his Creatures, but we must be immediately struck with the Love and Admiration of the Divine Goodness. And tho' I shall not deny

deny but that we may *afterwards* proceed from the rest of his Perfections, to infer the Belief of his *Justice*; yet we can never be able to see any ground to ascribe such a *kind of Justice* to God, as must exclude *all Degrees of Mercy and Goodness*. He that is all-sufficient to himself, and compleatly happy in the Enjoyment of his own Perfections, could be induc'd by no other Motive (as far as we can see) to give Being to his Creatures at first, but only by the Desire of communicating his own Happiness, according to their various Capacities, to all possible Objects of his Bounty. And since he is *the same both Yesterday, to Day, and for ever*, he seems obliged by the unchangeable Rectitude of his Nature to pursue the same gracious Design, the promoting the Happiness of his Creatures, by all the various Dispensations of his Providence, as far as may be consistent with his *Wisdom and Justice*. How far these *Attributes* may allow him, according to *our Notions*, to extend his *Mercy and Goodness*, it is not here necessary to enquire; both because I may have a better Opportunity to touch upon this hereafter, and likewise because it seems sufficient to say at present, that the least Degree of *either*, is inconsistent with our entertaining any Apprehensions of God's proceeding with us according to the Rigor of *strict Justice*. We have a *Maxim* in relation

tion to our own Dealings with one another; that *summum jus*, is *summa injuria*, or *extream right is extream wrong*; and no one shall ever persuade me to ascribe *that* to God, which even a good Man would be unwilling to have believed of himself.

Thus far I have considered your Words in the most natural and obvious Meaning, and gone hitherto upon Supposition, that you intended no more by *sufficient Means*, than such as are *barely sufficient*. But that you may not complain of any Hardship done you, I am now willing to suppose more than the Words will bear, and allow you to comprehend under your *sufficient Means*, all Means whatever, that can possibly be employed by a wise and good Being for our *Conviction and Reformation*, consistent with that kind of Liberty he has bestowed on Man, and the Nature of that State he has placed him in, in the present World.

And then I readily grant that some Parts of your Argument will hang much better together. To affirm that God is *obliged* to afford us more than *this*, is no doubt of it, all one as to say, that it is *unjust in God to put us into a State of Tryal and Probation at all*; and that *he must be obliged to grant such a Degree of Evidence as will necessarily enforce Faith, and such a Degree of Grace as will compel Men to be good*. But notwithstanding all this, I don't see we are likely

to be any thing wiser as to the main Point, since we may safely grant as much as this comes to, without ever affecting the Merits of the Question. For whereas you are pleased to add immediately after the Words I last cited from you, *This rational Evidence then, and Sufficiency of Grace may have been rejected and withstood before Death; and consequently, notwithstanding any thing arising from strict Justice, a Man may outlive his Day of Grace, and be given up judicially, to final Obduracy and Impenitence*: I can't possibly make any thing more of *this*, than that you would be very well pleas'd, your Reader would be so good-humour'd as to wink hard, and suppose you had proved your Point, tho' he did not see *how*; and perhaps you may have the good Fortune to meet with some Persons that may be complaisant enough to take things upon trust, and that since you tell them you have proved it, may be unwilling to suspect your Veracity so much as to doubt it. But for my own Part, I have such an odd Sort of sturdy Humour in me, that I had much rather have laid an Obligation upon you, by giving up the Question at first, for meer asking for, without putting you to the trouble of using any Arguments about it, than suffer you to bully me out of my Opinion, and yield myself beaten without ever being touched.

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'Tis true I grant, and have granted already, that God is not obliged to afford us more than *sufficient Means*, comprehending under this Expression *all* possible Means that may be employed for our *Conviction and Reformation*, consistent with our State and Nature; but what follows from thence I beseech you? *That these Means may have been withstood and rejected before Death?* I protest, I look as sharp as I can with both Eyes, and still (except I must be obliged to take a *physical* for a *moral* Possibility) I cannot see *why*; and yet this may be true too, without its being any *necessary Consequence* that *a Man may outlive his Day of Grace*; and that for this plain Reason, because for ought you can tell, Death may follow as soon as he has done so, and allow him no time for *living* afterwards. But to let you see I love to be generous, and scorn to take all Advantages, I won't stand upon this, but confine myself to the first Part of your Conclusion; and as I know I am a little purblind, and not able to see things at any Distance, let them be ever so real, I will draw the Conclusion a little nearer to me, place that Proposition uppermost, and then see whether the Reason given will be able to support it. Now if we turn things about after this manner, Matters will stand thus: *All Means* (say you) *that can possibly be employed by a wise and good Being for our Con-*

viſtion and Reformation, conſiſtent with the Nature of our State, may be withſtood and rejected before Death. Ay, May they indeed? I never thought ſo before. But perhaps they may; however, ſince it is not a ſelf-evident Truth, Be ſo kind as to give me your Reaſon for it. To which Demand I muſt ſuppoſe I hear you making this Answer. *I told you theſe Means might be all withſtood and rejected before Death, becauſe if they are, God is not obliged in ſtrict Juſtice to extend his Goodneſs any farther.* I really did not know *ſtrict Juſtice* would have obliged him to be ſo good as to go ſo far; but I believe, Sir, you miſtook my Queſtion, I did not ask you whether God would be obliged to uſe any other Way for our *Conviction and Reformation*, after we had *withſtood and rejected* all Means conſiſtent with the Nature of our State; but, from whence you knew it was *morally* poſſible that *all theſe* might be *withſtood and rejected before Death.* This is the Queſtion I aſk'd you, and to which I ſhould be glad of an Answer. Do you think, Sir, ſuch a Reply would be at all unreaſonable for me to give to ſuch an Answer as above? If it would not, I ſee I muſt wait ſome time yet, for any thing contain'd in your *Papers*, to have my Enquiry ſatiſfied: And whenever you attempt it, I will beg the Favour of you, to take a little Notice of a Query or two more. How come you ſo well acquainted

quainted with the Nature of Man, as to be able to tell what Means are consistent with human Liberty, and what not? From whence does it appear that God has at any time *actually* employed for the *Conviction and Reformation* of any Sinner whatever, all the Means it was in his Power to employ, consistent with the Nature of human Liberty? And lastly, who inform'd you, that at the Time they were made use of, they were not attended with a happy Event? The Reason I put these Queries to you, is very obvious: Because, unless you know what *all* the Means consistent with human Liberty amount to, whether they have ever been *all* of them actually tried upon *one and the same Person*, or not, and what Success attended the Trial, it must be impossible for you to determine whether *they may be withstood and rejected before Death*, or not. However, to shorten your Trouble, I will take it for granted, that if *they may be withstood and rejected at all*, it may be done *before Death*; for I have no ground to expect there will be any Opportunity for the doing it afterwards.

I should in this place add some other Questions to the foregoing ones, in relation to the *Wisdom and Goodness* of God, did I not think I have given you Work enough for one time, and foresee I shall have a proper place again to discourse somewhat more with you on these Topicks before we part.

And here, when I first read those Words of yours, *Now let us enquire how the Matter stands upon the Foot of Scripture, from God's Declarations and Methods of Procedure as recorded there*; I was tempted to think you had already taken your final Leave of your Proofs from *natural Reason*, and that we should now hear of nothing else in the rest of your *Paper* but of *Texts of Scripture*, and their true Interpretation. But I afterwards soon found that instead of setting yourself in earnest to *enquire how the Matter stands upon the Foot of Scripture*, you design'd no more by all this, but only to make the *Scripture* a civil Compliment, that you might not appear too plainly to neglect it, in a *Point that can't be determin'd by Reason*; like some other Persons you and I *both* know in the World, who tho' they are too wise to rest their Cause upon the Interpretation of particular Passages of Scripture, which may not only be controverted, but even turned against them, do yet often bestow abundance of good Words on that *Book*, for fear of giving Scandal to any weak and ignorant People. And thus in the same Manner, you give us Encouragement to hope, you are now going to offer your Notion to be tried by *Scripture*, where alone it can properly be determin'd; and yet 'till we come to the very End of all your Proof (where

(where we find a few *Texts* hinted at by the Bye, as it were for *Form's* sake) we must not expect, notwithstanding your Promise, to meet with any one Word that has the least Relation to it, excepting only that the *Law* was not given to the *Gentiles*, nor the *Gospel* preached before the Coming of *Christ*. So that all the Difference I can discern between what we have been doing already, and what we are now to proceed upon, is only *this*, that whereas before you labour'd to shew the State you contend for, to be agreeable to our natural Notions of God and his Attributes, by proving it not inconsistent with the Rules of *strict Justice*, you now attempt to shew it must be agreeable to the Divine *Wisdom and Goodness*, as far as can be collected from God's past Proceedings in his Government of the World.

But before you enter upon this Undertaking, you are pleased to declare, you don't mean to dispute the Extent of *Almighty Power*; and for this Reason are so kind as to allow us, that *he who made our Faculties and Wills can influence and change them at his Pleasure*. And as I am so much of your Mind, as not to think *this* sufficient to determine the *Question*, I see nothing that need occasion our making any stop here; only methinks, if I had been at liberty to chuse your Words for you, I would have taken a little Care when I

undertook to write so *accurate* a Performance, not to have expressed myself in that loose negligent Manner, as if I thought either that the *Will* (which is nothing but the Power of chusing) was no *Faculty*, or that there were in Man more *Wills* than one.

But for fear we should make a wrong Use of your Concessions, you are resolved not to be too liberal of them; and therefore tho' you grant God *can* do all you have mention'd before, yet you deny that *it appears*, or even *seems to be likely*, that he ever *has actually exercis'd such a sovereign Authority*, so much as in any one single Instance. By which if you mean (as I suppose you do) such an *Authority*, or Power, as overrules the Exercise of our Faculties, or destroys the natural Liberty of Man to chuse Good or Evil, I will not dispute the Matter with you, for such Reasons as may be inferr'd from what has been said *above*. But I can by no means agree that if there had been any such Instances, *these would not have been properly Acts of God's Mercy and Goodness, as well as of his Wisdom to serve some great Purposes of Government*. How far St. Paul may be reckon'd an Instance of this Sort, is not easy to determine; since it does not *appear* how far the Spirit of God acted upon the Mind of that *Apostle* at the Time of his *Conversion*. Those Words of his

his to King *Agrippa*, *I was not disobedient unto the heavenly Vision*;^{*} seem to imply indeed that he was laid under no *absolute* Necessity of paying Obedience to it; however *this* we are sure of, that his *Conversion* was the Effect of such a miraculous Power, that we can hardly form to ourselves any Notion of so great an Obstinacy as could have been able to withstand it. And tho' this miraculous Power was exerted, as the *Scripture* informs us, in order to make *St. Paul* a great Instrument in the Hands of God, for the Propagation of the *Gospel* amongst the *Gentiles*; yet all this does not hinder the *Apostle* from continually speaking of it, as an *Act* of great *Mercy and Goodness* towards him: And therefore, tho' as you say, *we cannot argue from what God has done in one Case, to what he will do in another*; yet *this* and other extraordinary Instances of the like Nature, may serve to give us greater Ground of Comfort, and Encouragement for our Hope in *all* Cases; because they tend to raise in our Minds the highest Notions of the long *Suffering and Kindness* of God our Saviour, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all Men should come to Repentance, and be saved by the Knowledge of the Truth.

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* Acts xxvi. 19.

This is the great End of all God's Proceedings in his Government of the World, the promoting the Happiness of Mankind: And tho' we may well suppose, that in the carrying on this gracious Design, he never exerts any extraordinary Acts of Power, but for some extraordinary Purposes, which cannot be so well attain'd any other Way; yet we can have no Reason from hence to affirm, that because these Instances of Power tend more directly to the *general* Benefit of Mankind, *therefore* they may not as *properly* be esteem'd *Acts of Mercy and Goodness to particular* Persons, as any other more ordinary Acts of his Providence. The miraculous Cures perform'd by our blessed *Saviour* upon the Bodies of Men, tho' design'd to convince the World of his own Divine Authority, and thereby to set forth the Glory of God in a more extraordinary Manner, were all of them as *properly Acts of Mercy and Goodness* to the diseas'd, as the ordinary Operations of the *Spirit* upon the Mind, are, at present, to every Believer who receives the Benefit of them. And these *latter Acts of Mercy and Goodness* do in their Proportion and Degree tend to the same great End with the *former*; namely, the manifesting the Perfections of God to the World, and the asserting the Divine Origin of our *holy Religion*; according to *that* of our Lord, *Let your light so shine before men, that they*
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may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven*.

As to what you tell us, that *the divine Mercy and Goodness must always operate equally towards Objects in the same Circumstances*, this is not absolutely true in itself. Many Cases may be put, where it may be impossible for God to be determin'd in the Exercise of his *Mercy and Goodness*, by any other Reason but his own *Will and Pleasure*. Before the Creation, while his Creatures had yet no Being, and consequently *had done neither Good nor Evil*, what could move him to bestow glorious Perfections upon one in comparison of another; make one a Man, and another a Brute, and so *vice versa*, but the arbitrary Determination of his own Choice? Again, may we not be at Liberty to suppose two Persons exactly in the *same Circumstances*, and yet if the Wisdom of God has before determin'd him to bestow a particular kind of Blessing but upon *one* of them, must we not grant that it is not possible for his *Mercy and Goodness* to *operate equally towards both*? Had *Jacob* and *Esau*, for instance, been both in the *same Circumstances*, yet the Wisdom of God, having determin'd that only *one* of them should inherit the promis'd Blessing, it became necessary that the *other* should comparatively be pass'd by and neglected.

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* Matt. v. 16.

It were easy to give many other Examples of the same Nature; but it seems unnecessary, since it is sufficient to say, that tho' it be certain God never acts out of Caprice, or Humour, but is always determin'd in the Exercise of his Government of the World, by such Reasons as are infinitely wise and good in themselves, yet the Knowledge of these Reasons are so generally conceal'd from Men, that his Proceedings appear to us, for want of competent Knowledge to judge of them, to be in a great Measure arbitrary; according to *that* of the *Apostle*, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor *?* And this is the least that we can suppose to be implied in that Declaration of God, *I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy †*. We are taught the same Doctrine from the *Parable* of the *Labourers* in the *Vineyard*; *Where*, when some murmured, *That they which had wrought but one hour, were made equal unto them which had born the burden and heat of the day*; the Lord of the *Vineyard*, thought it sufficient to answer one of them; *Friend, I do thee no wrong: is it not law-*

* Rom. ii. 33, 34.

† Exod. xxxiii. 19.

lawful for me to do what I will with mine own * ? And lastly, with this agrees the whole ninth Chapter to the *Romans*, where *St. Paul* seems to set himself to shew that the *Purposes* of God in *Election*, tho' founded in the highest Wisdom and Justice, are so altogether unsearchable by human Reason, that we are unable, as to what appears to us, to resolve his Proceedings in this Matter, into any Thing else besides his own absolute Will and Pleasure. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth Mercy †.

From hence appears the Vanity of your pretending to prove the *Point* you contend for, from the *general stated Laws* by which God governs the World. For tho' it may be true that God has prescribed himself Rules, founded in his infinite Wisdom, for the Government of the *moral* as well as *natural* World; yet if either these Rules, or the Subject upon which this Government is exercised, viz. the *human Mind*, are in a great Measure concealed from your Knowledge, from whence will you be able to form such Observations upon the past Proceedings of God, as to be able to *reason conclusively* from them?

To

* Matt. xx.

† Rom. ix. 16.

To convince you more fully, if possible, of the Folly of such an Attempt; be pleased to tell me by what Rules God proceeds in affording greater Degrees of Light to some Nations than others? Why is the Knowledge of the Gospel continued at this Day to some People who slight and abuse it, and not at all imparted to others? And why did our Lord when it was first published, preach it in some Cities, and attest the Truth of it by so many Signs and Wonders *where* he knew it would be despised and rejected, at the same that he neglected other Places, that would have received and obey'd it? Our Saviour's own Words * to his Countrymen, tho' they give a particular Reason why he made no long stay among *them*, do yet seem plainly to intimate to us, that if we search for any other Reasons in general of those Dispensations of Providence, but the good Pleasure of God, our Enquiries must prove vain and fruitless. *And he said unto them, ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician heal thy self, whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great* fa-

* Matt. xi.

famine was throughout all the land : But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow ; and many lepers were in Israel, in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.*

Now, if, as our Saviour seems to argue here, the past Methods of Providence in the Government of the World are so far from being of any use to us, to enable us to determine by what Rules, or Laws, God proceeds in the giving, continuing, or withholding the Light of his Gospel, or any other outward Means of Grace, that they ought to discourage us from any search after them; how can it be imagin'd, that they can prove more effectual in enabling us to discover the Rules, or Laws, which God may have prescribed to himself for dispensing the inward Assistance of his Spirit? And yet this is all the Ground you pretend to go upon in the Argument you offer as a *conclusive Proof* of the State you have asserted, as will evidently appear from the following Examination of it.

God, say you, governs the moral, as well as the natural World, by general stated Laws : i. e. I suppose, as he has established general Laws of Motion for the Government of the

* Luke iv. 23—26.

material World, so he has prescribed to himself fixed and certain Rules, or Laws, for his Proceedings in the Government of Man. Well, that the Argument may proceed, let it be granted, tho' I must still continue to profess myself, in a great Measure, ignorant of the Nature of them; but I hope you will inform me. What is the next Step, pray? *Different Means of Grace have been afforded to different Ages.* I believe there has. what follows? *The Heathens had the least, the Jews more, and Christians now enjoy the greatest Means of all.* So I always thought; but what am I to infer from hence? *That since God has been pleased to make these three different Dispensations, the ordinary Rule of his Proceedings towards the Heathens, Jews, and Christians respectively, no one under the last Dispensation has a Right to require, or Reason to expect any other than the ordinary Means appointed for Christians in general, no more than a Jew could have claim'd or expected what the Gospel Covenant imparts, or an Heathen have demanded or expected the superior Advantages allowed to the Jews.*

I can't yet see whither all this tends, or what use you design to make of it; but whether it be to the Purpose or beside the Purpose, you must not expect all this can be suffer'd to pass just in the Manner it is here laid down. It seems to me that the *Jews* had reason both to *claim and expect*
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what the Gospel Covenant imparts, because they stood intitled to it by Promise; the *Heathens* indeed had no right to demand, but from their *natural* Apprehensions of the Goodness of the Divine Being they had much ground to *hope*, that since the Light of Reason had in a great Measure fail'd of being able to instruct the World in the Knowledge of the Nature and Will of God, some more effectual Means would one time or other be employ'd to reveal these important Truths to them. No *Christians*, I grant, can have any Ground to hope or expect more than the ordinary Means appointed under the *Gospel* Dispensation; but the Reasons are, not because in *strict Justice* they can demand no more, but because this Dispensation can never fail by *Christ's* Promise of producing in some Measure, the End design'd by it; and likewise because we have express Warning given us in *Scripture*, that if we neglect or abuse the Means vouchsafed under the *Gospel*, we have nothing further to expect; for that this is the last and greatest Effort of Mercy that God will make for the reclaiming a wicked World.

These Observations offer'd themselves so directly in the Way, that it was hardly possible to forbear taking some Notice of them, tho' I believe more than necessary, as to any Advantage you can possibly make of all that

that has been hitherto said. Be pleas'd therefore to inform me, how you intend I should apply the foregoing Argument *to the Point under Consideration*. For tho' when I look back upon your *Paper*, I find you think you have been doing it already, yet for fear all the rest of your *Readers* should in this respect be as dull as myself, I can't but hope you have something left still in reserve to shew us a little more plainly where the Force of it lies. Let us hear then what follows. *This being the Case; it appearing both from Scripture and Experience, that there has been always a settled Course of Providence, from which it did not depart but on some very extraordinary Occasions, respecting the great Ends of Government, and that in Consequence of this establish'd Method of Government, Christians in general, who slight the ordinary Means of Grace appointed for them, have no Title to extraordinary Ones, nor any Ground of Hope that God will grant them; therefore from these Principles you think it will follow, that you have proved your Assertion.* This indeed is somewhat so admirable, that to be sure, Sir, you must have studied *Mathematicks* very closely in your younger Days, or have since been much conversant with That great Master of Reason Mr. *Chillingworth*, to have acquir'd this excellent Knack at disputing, and to have learned so nicely to adapt your Principles

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to your Conclusion, as to infer not a Tittle in the Consequence beyond what is contain'd in the Premises. How superior must a *Writer* with your prodigious Talents appear to all his *Cotemporaries*, when he is able to make Arguments of such Materials as no one could use but himself, and then tack the Point to them which he is to prove, so firmly, that nothing but *Scripture very plain indeed, and incapable of any other Construction*, can ever make them drop asunder? But if it be not too much Presumption, I could be glad to borrow your *Spectacles* for a Moment, to discover what magick Charm you employ to unite together Principles and Conclusions, *where*, with my *naked* Eyes, I am utterly unable to discern the least Connection. If I did not know that I had much Reason to suspect my own Understanding, when I peruse the Works of a great *Genius*, I should have been extreamly apt to fancy in this *Place* some Omission or other of the Printer, which I should have thought the more fatal, as I am altogether at a Loss to conjecture which way I am to supply it. For I own to you truly, I can as yet discern nothing more in all you have said, than what might be express'd in common Words thus.

God did not favour *Men* that lived under the Light of Nature *only*, with any *Revelation*; nor did he reveal the *Gospel* to the *Jews*, to
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whom he only gave the *Law* (which as I hinted before, is not strictly true neither;) nor lastly, will he grant to *Christians* any other ordinary and *outward Means of Grace* than those contained in the *Gospel*; and therefore because if they resist these, God will raise no other Person from the Dead, nor send any other Messenger from Heaven, to work new Miracles, and to preach new Gospels, besides that which has been already delivered by our *Lord*, we may from hence conclude, that it is most agreeable to God's *Justice, Wisdom and Goodness*, to withdraw the common and ordinary Influences of his Spirit; together with all the outward Calls of his Word and his Providence, from such Infidels and Sinners, and leave them in a state of *absolute Reprobation*, or under a *judicial and unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*.

I beseech you, Sir, read over this Argument again, and tell me how you like it; and, at the same time, do me the Justice to take notice, that I acknowledge I have inserted of myself, the withdrawing the outward Means of Grace (when you mentioned no more than the *common and ordinary Influences of the Spirit*) in order to recommend the Argument the better to your Approbation. But I had a right to add *these* to the *other*, for two Reasons: *First*, Because you have drawn your Argument wholly from the

the *outward Means* afforded to *Jews* and *Heathens*, and have not at all meddled with the *common and ordinary Influences of the Spirit*, upon the Minds of either of those Sorts of *People*; even so much as to let us understand whether you think there were any such or not. And, *Secondly*, Because no outward Calls of God's *Word*, or Providence, can prove effectual to beget Repentance, where God is not pleased to accompany them with the inward Assistance of his *Spirit*; and then you know those outward Means must be withdrawn too, since as you tell us, *it can never be an Act of Wisdom to do any thing to no good Purpose*. But our own *Experience*, which teaches nothing else in this Matter that I know of, shews us evidently *this* is false; for we see every Day, that the outward Means of Grace are continued to the very worst of Sinners to their Lives End. And therefore with your good Leave, I shall borrow a little from you *here*; and say, that because the continuing the outward Means can be to *no good Purpose* without the inward Aid of the *Spirit*, we have good Reason to presume *this* is continued too.

I know it may be said, that the outward Means can't be withdrawn without interrupting those *general Laws* you insist so much upon, by which God governs the World. But according to you, God has

likewise fixed and established *general Rules* for the ordinary Dispensation of his *spiritual* Grace, or inward Assistance of his *Holy Spirit*: And probably he may; but whatever these Rules are (for they have not been *all* fully revealed to *me*, tho' you seem to be as well acquainted with them, as if you had been of Counsel with God in the establishing them) I am sure this is not one of them, never to bestow it *where* he foresees it will prove *ineffectual to Salvation*. For since as you say, it would be *Blasphemy to pretend that God cannot tell what Effect* his Grace will have upon all Men, we must be obliged upon such a Supposition, to believe, no Man who dies in an impenitent State ever received it at all, which is what I imagine you will not venture to assert, because the *Scripture* speaks of *receiving the Grace of God in vain*.

But to help you a little towards an Answer, because methinks, I see you somewhat at a loss, what say you now of altering your Definition of *judicial and final Obduration*, and explaining this State to consist not in God's wholly *ceasing to act upon the Mind by the Operations of his Spirit*, and in *determining never more to afford these Aids*, but only in God's resolving not to bestow any extraordinary Assistances of his *Spirit*, while the ordinary Influences continue to be abused. And really if it would do

do you any good, I could be content to lend you *this*, in return for borrowing of you before; but the Mischief is, you have so puzzled the Case with your Concessions, that this will not be sufficient to help you out of your Difficulties. For, as you say very right, *we can never tell that any Sinner is incapable of being influenced by the ordinary Assistances of Grace; no, not tho' he be notoriously wicked, and living as it were, without God in the World.* And that we may not mistake your Meaning, you apply this general Position to the very worst Cases that can possibly be imagin'd; to Sinners enslaved so far to their Vices, that their wicked Habits by growing as it were, into the original Constitution of their Bodies and Temper of their Minds, are become part of their Nature; to confirm'd Infidels, who have fallen from Religion, after they were educated in a Christian Country in the Christian Faith, and were once rooted and grounded in its Principles; to such Persons in a word, as cannot have stronger Reasons for believing Christianity than they have rejected; or stronger Assistances from the Holy Ghost, than they have resisted. And tho' this last Case seems to go farther than necessary; or it may be, than you here intended, and looks somewhat like confounding the ordinary, with the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, yet the Reason you give for granting

all this, is very material, and well worth the observing; *viz.* because *the same Evidence may appear stronger to the Mind at one Time than at another; and the same Degree of Grace be more influential on it under some Circumstances, than under others;* and, so no doubt it may: But then who that reads these Concessions, and considers well the Reason which is here assigned for them, would ever expect to find the same *Writer* in another *Place* expressing himself in the Manner that follows? Now, will any one say that a *Christian* cannot, before *Death*, bring himself into such a State as to be above the Influence of the ordinary Means of Grace? To which I answer, that I am sure no one ought to be very forward to affirm the contrary, if it was for no other Reason but that I have now cited from you.

However, before I shall take upon me fully to resolve this Question, I must desire you to explain to me what you *here* understand by *the ordinary Means of Grace*; for if you understand by them only the natural Efficacy of the *Word*, join'd with the Instruction, Advice, Exhortation and Reproof of the Clergy, or other good Men, without any concurrent Assistance of the *Spirit* of God, no one shall say so with my consent. But then this would be directly begging the Question in dispute, and supposing that Men are sometimes continued in Life after God

God has totally abandon'd them, and finish'd their State of Trial. But if in the *ordinary Means of Grace*, you design here to include the ordinary Assistance of the *Spirit*, then for want of competent Knowledge in what that Assistance consists, and to what it extends; I believe no considering Person, that has not form'd his Judgment upon this Point from other Reasons, will venture to say either the one or the other.

You add, *this is absurd, unless we suppose what is equally absurd; and that is, that the ordinary Means of Grace under the Gospel supersede and destroy Free Will; or that tho' Men continue Free Agents, at liberty to neglect and abuse those Means, yet that none of them do it.* Pray Sir, from whence does it, or can it appear, that any Men while they continue Free Agents, or retain their Free Will, may be *incapable* of being wrought upon by any less Degree of Grace, than what must supercede and destroy Free Will? And if they are not *incapable* of being influenc'd by less than *this*, their *actual Neglect*, or *Abuse*, of any less Degrees, does not at all come up to the Question. So that I am almost tempted to think, because it is more to the Purpose, tho' the very Reverse of what your Words express, that you mean to intimate, that by the Neglect and Abuse of Grace we may destroy our Free Will, and *cease* to be Free Agents.

But *this* will remain to be proved ; and when it is proved *possible*, it must likewise be shewn that any Men do *in fact* sin to that degree ; and *lastly*, that after they have done so, God sometimes continues such Men in Life, or in a State of Probation, after their Time of Trial is ended. None of which Things have you yet offer'd one Title towards the proving. You say, indeed, upon the following Side of the *Leaf*, that *an Incapacity of Repentance may naturally arise sooner than the Time of Life's Expiration, from the Causes that produce it.* But saying so is no Proof. That great and crying Sins repeated, or Sins of any Nature long persisted in, do *naturally* make Repentance more difficult and uncertain, no one will dispute. But how *long* a Course of Sinning must be persisted in, or how *many* Sins, and what *kind* of Sins are requir'd to lay a Man under an *Incapacity* of Repenting, I suppose must ever continue in the dark. As to God's continuing Men in Life after their State of Trial is ended, you say, *God may have wise Reasons for continuing them some time here in such a State of Impenitence, as well as for suffering them after Death to continue in it to all Eternity.* To which it may be sufficient to answer, that if we could by any means learn that God ever does so, he would no doubt *have wise Reasons* for it. But till you can shew, which it would

would be Presumption in any mortal Man to attempt, that there are wise Ends and Designs to be attained by this Means, which cannot be compassed so well any other way, we must not immediately conclude, that because such a Method of Providence might have wise Reasons assign'd for it by so acute a Person as your self, *therefore* God does certainly act in this manner. Besides, I hope you do not mean that God does *ordinarily* act in this Manner, for the contrary is most apparent ; and if it be only in an extraordinary Instance or two, the Reasons assign'd for admitting such a Supposition had need be very extraordinary too, or else what will become of that you *before* made such a Stir about, *God's governing the moral as well as the natural World, by general stated Laws.*

But this *Passage* of yours calls for some farther Observations before I can dismiss it. You say *God may have wise Reasons for continuing a Man some time here in such a State of Impenitence, as well as for suffering him after Death to continue in it to all Eternity.* Sure, Sir, there is a wide Difference between these two Cases. The one is the proper Time of Probation, the other of Punishment ; the one is before Judgment and Sentence, and the other after it. And probably the only good Reason, that can be assign'd, why Sinners should continue impenitent in the other World to all Eternity, is because
they

they can have no grounds to expect Pardon upon Repentance; which I suppose no good Christian, such as I hope you to be, will ever affirm to be at any time the Case in this World; for *this* would be doing *designedly*, what you charge Dr. Lucas with doing *contrary to his Design*, using such Arguments to support your *Hypothesis* as undermine the Foundation of the Gospel. And for this Reason I am much concerned at a Passage I meet with in your second Paper; Yet even for *these* (Apostates and Reprobates) I would fain believe there is still room for Mercy, if they can apply for it; which Words of yours seem to imply, you would be glad you could see Reason to believe it, and by consequence may be construed to intimate some Degree of Doubt in you, whether there be Room for *all* Sinners to expect Mercy even upon Repentance. But I have too good an Opinion of your Christianity, to suspect *this* ought to be looked upon as any thing more than a meer unguarded Expression, which I conclude you would never have suffer'd to slip from you, if you had weighed all your Words with that Caution you pretend to in the Beginning of that Paper, and which as you there own, becomes a Matter of such infinite Concern.

We are now come at last to those *satisfactory Texts* as you call them, that are perfectly correspondent with your Notion, which

I shall examine presently; only I can't help *first*, taking notice once more by the way, of what you tell us in your Introduction to them, that you *chose to proceed in the former Method of Proof*, as more certain than to *rest the Cause upon the Interpretation of particular Passages of Scripture which may be controverted*. I confess, Sir, almost every thing may be *controverted*, and I doubt has been so at one time or other, by odd kind of People. But I always took it to be the Belief of *Protestants*, that all *such important Points*, as you affirm *this to be, which concern the Safety of Mankind in respect to their future State, and which OUGHT NOT to be concealed from them*, might be found *plainly deliver'd in the Scriptures*. From whence I naturally conclude, you must think surprisingly well of your own Abilities, when you imagin'd you could either lay down such undoubted *Principles* as no body would contest with you; or that you could afterwards prove your Opinion from them in a *Point* which is not to be *determin'd by Reason*, with greater *Clearness and Certainty* than the *Spirit of God* could direct the *sacred Authors* to express any Proposition in *Scripture*. But I suspect all this proceeded from a secret Consciousness, that the *Declarations of God in Scripture* when produced, would appear little to your Purpose; and therefore I doubt, it is not for *nothing* that

that you tell us these *satisfactory Texts* are perfectly *correspondent* with your Notion.

I am so very unfortunate, that thro' your whole *Performance*, I am perpetually at a Loss what Signification your Words are design'd to carry with them. When I had got in your *Paper* as far as *satisfactory Texts*, I thought I had Reason to expect nothing less than seeing some *Passages of Scripture*, in which at least you *your self* believed, your Opinion might be found fully laid down and asserted in clear and express Words; but before I am at the end of the same *Sentence*, I perceive your Heart misgives you, and they are only *Texts correspondent* with your Notion. Pray, Sir, what is *that*? *Texts* that don't overthrow, or are not inconsistent with your Notion? Why no doubt, there are many of those; and if *this* will serve the Turn, it may be very easy to prove contradictory Notions from *Scripture*, nay from one and the same *Text* of *Scripture*; for it may very well happen to be thus far *correspondent* with *both* the Notions, as not to be inconsistent with *either* of them. I hope the first *Text* you take Notice of in Dr. *Lucas's Discourse*, as what furnish'd *him* with an Opportunity to make *his strange kind of Reasoning*, as you are modestly pleased to term it, may at least be allowed to *correspond* so far with *his Notion* too, as not to intimate any thing inconsistent

stent with what he undertook to prove. Indeed that *Text*, notwithstanding the *strange kind of Question* you gravely ask upon it, seems to me to go a little farther, and in some degree, to imply the Truth of what he contends for; and if *this* be what you mean by *Texts perfectly correspondent with your Notion*, viz. that tho' they don't expressly assert, God is pleas'd to *continue any Christians here in a State of judicial and final Obduration, or under an unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*, yet they tacitly seem to imply as much; *this*, I own, would be saying something to the Purpose; but then it would fall out very unhappily, that the *Text* you place in the Front of all the rest of your *correspondent Texts*, and where one might reasonably expect to find this State the most strongly implied, implies just the quite contrary of what you would have it. So that if the *Texts correspond* with one another, as I make no question but they do, you had much better, in my humble Opinion, quit all Claim of holding *Correspondence* with any of them.

But to examine the Texts themselves: *My Spirit shall not always strive with Man*, A surprizing Citation this! enough to convince any one, that it is a Custom with some *Writers* to cite *Scripture* rather for the *Sound* of the Words than the *Sense* of them.

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For had you attended but ever so little to the true *Design* of this *Passage*, you would soon have found that *Man* does not here refer to all Mankind in all Ages, but to the *Ante-diluvians* only. Neither does it concern any particular Persons among them, more wicked than the rest, but relates to that whole Generation; and will any one say that God declares his Resolution in this *Text*, to conclude all that Race of Men under a *judicial and unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*, excepting only *eight Souls*? If so, to what good purpose did he stir up *Noah* to be a *Preacher of Righteousness* * to that *World*, while the *Ark* was a preparing, † when he had already resolved so entirely to abandon all those *ungodly Men*, as to afford none of them such *Aids of his Spirit* as should be even so much as *barely sufficient* to put them into a Capacity of Repentance? But I believe, few that remember how that Passage stands in the *Bible*, need be told what the Meaning of it is; and to save those that have forgotten it, the Trouble of turning to it now, I shall here set down the *verse* entire: *And the Lord said; My Spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is Flesh; yet his Days shall be an hundred and twenty Years* ‡, i. e. God determin'd not to bear with the Wickedness

* 2 Pet. ii. 5.
vi. 3.

† 1 Pet. iii. 20.

‡ Gen.

ness of Man for ever, but to fix a certain Period of Time, *an hundred and twenty Years*, after which he was resolved to put an End to his Patience, and to wait for the Repentance of that Generation no longer. Tho' Man was *Flesh* as the Text expresses it, *i. e.* wholly given up to the Gratification of his *Fleshly Lusts*; and tho' he had by that means *wearied out the Spirit of God* so far as to provoke him to *seal up those Sinners under the Doom of Ruin* if they did not repent within a hundred and twenty Years; yet this Ruin was not, that he would then abandon them to live on in a State, wherein they should lie under *an unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*, for want of the necessary Assistance of his *Grace*; but that his *Spirit* after so much *Long-suffering* should not continue to strive with them any longer, because he was then resolved to destroy them all from the Face of the Earth, by that universal Deluge, which *Noah* was appointed to *preach and testify* unto them, till the Determination of that Time.

After so plain and natural an Interpretation, as I have now given of the *Passage* before us; it would be suspecting my *Reader's* Understanding to call upon him here to observe, that these Words, *My Spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is Flesh*; yet *his Days shall be an hundred*
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and twenty Years, are so far from implying that God's *Spirit* shall *cease* to strive with Man, upon the Account of his Wickedness, before his Days are ended ; that, on the contrary, it strongly implies, the *Spirit* should *continue* to strive with him notwithstanding his Wickedness, as long as his Life should last ; but that the *Spirit* of God might not *always* strive to no Purpose, he should be *destroyed* after a hundred and twenty Years, if he did not repent sooner. So, that as far as appears in this *Text*, the *striving* of the Divine *Spirit* with Man so long to win him to Repentance, and the permitting him to live so long, are Expressions of one and the same Signification.

The next *Text* is Rom. i. 28. *God gave them over to a reprobate Mind*. Pray Sir what is it you would have any one infer from hence ? Did not St. *Paul* say this of all the *Heathen* World in general, that then was, before the coming of our *Saviour* ? And can you really think that all those *Heathens* were shut up by a *judicial* Sentence, under an *unalterable Incapacity* of Repentance, and consequently of Pardon ? If so, how came some of the worst of these Men to be afterwards *washed, sanctified, and justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God* ? as you may see, 1 Cor. vi. 11. And if not, what is this or
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a thousand *such* like Texts to the Purpose you alledge it?

This Word *such*, Sir, puts me in mind of a little Inaccuracy in your Language, which it would not be worth my while to take Notice of, amidst so many groffer Blunders in the Sense of your *Papers*, if you had not taken upon you to charge Inaccuracies upon a *Work*, where you are able to shew none. Your Words are these, *I must think some of them* (Passages of Scripture) *satisfactory, as being perfectly correspondent with this Notion:—Such as, My Spirit shall not always strive with Man:—Such as, those Heathens, &c.* i. e. by the Rules of Grammer, *such* Passages of Scripture *as, those Heathens* (did what Sir? where is the Verb? cite, or read, or reject? No, no *such* Matter, but) *whom St. Paul says, God gave over to a reprobate Mind.*

But let us go on to more weighty Matters, and examine what follows. *And those* (again not Passages of Scripture, but) *Jews from whom, as we are inform'd by the Parable of the Talents, God withdrew his Spirit, because they had not improved it.* I really think *such as, those Heathens* might have served here again, full as well as they did before; but if there be any Beauty in changing the Expression into *and those Jews*, with all my Heart, I will not dispute with you

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about Trifles; especially in a *Passage*, where the Generality of *Readers* must stand oblig'd to you for so much new Light pour'd into them, as in *that* before us. For I believe, few Men ever knew till this Moment, that the *Parable* concern'd either the *Heathens*, or *Jews*, in particular; but rather thought it concern'd all Mankind in general, who have here represented to them, as is commonly supposed, the Proceedings of our *Lord* at the Day of Judgment, somewhat more largely and distinctly than in the *Parable of the wise and foolish Virgins*, to which it is immediately subjoined by St. *Matthew* *, and which seems more certainly to relate to good and bad *Christians* only.

I should now be apt to call upon your *Readers* to bless themselves for the great Happiness that has befallen them in lighting upon a *Writer*, that will teach them to reform their old Errors, did I not consider, that Men are commonly so obstinate, as not to change their old Opinions for new, merely because they are told they are in the wrong, without so much as the least shew of an Argument to prove it. But, to be serious, it appears both from what goes before the *Parable*, and from what follows after it, and from every Part of it, that it was intended by our *Lord* for a Description of

* Chap. xxv.

of the Manner, in which Sentence should pass at the last Day. His *Disciples* had propounded to him at the beginning of the foregoing *Chapter* *, two Questions; one concerning the time of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the other of the *End of the World*. To both which, our *Saviour* returns full and distinct Answers. He first acquaints them with many Signs that should foretell the Desolation of *Jerusalem*, and with the great *Tribulation* that should accompany the particular Judgment of that wicked and ungrateful City; and then † proceeds to represent the Terrors of the last and general Judgment at the *End of the World*. After which, he tells them, that as to the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, the Signs he had given them, might as certainly enable them to discover the time of its coming, as the putting forth of the *Leaves* of the *Fig-tree* || could inform them of the approach of Summer; and concludes his whole Account of that Matter, with assuring them, that the *Generation* which was then living, should not pass, till all these Things were fulfilled ‡. But as to the time of the last Judgment, or *End of the World*; he declares, Of that Day and Hour knoweth no Man; no, not the *Angels of Heaven*, but my Father only **.

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From

* Matt. xxiv. ver. 3.
|| Ver. 32, 33.

† Ver. 34.

† Ibid. ver. 29.
** Ver. 36.

From which Uncertainty, he draws this Inference, *Watch therefore, for ye know not what Hour your Lord doth come**. And to excite all Men to this Watchfulness, many Arguments are made use of, in the various Descriptions that are given us of the Proceedings that shall be observed at the last Day; and of the happy and miserable Consequences, that will attend our being either acquitted, or condemn'd, at that Tribunal. These Descriptions are continued on thro' the remainder of that 24th Chapter of St. Matthew, to the very End of the 25th; in the middle of which, we meet with this *Parable of the Talents*. The Chapter begins with *that of the wise and foolish Virgins*; which must needs be understood of the last Judgment, not only from the Matter of it, but likewise because it is confin'd to that Time, by its being connected to the precedent Accounts of this Judgment, with the Word *Then* (τότε) at the Entrance of it. *Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be liken'd unto ten Virgins, &c. †*. Besides which, it is worth observing, that we are prevented from all possibility of mistaking the Time that *Parable* relates to, by our Lord's concluding it with the very same Exhortation, he had just before taken occasion to make from the Uncertainty of the Day of Judgment;
Watch

* Matt. xxiv. ver. 42.

† Chap. xxv. ver. 1.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh *. Then follows immediatly, without any intervening Words whatever, this *Parable* of the *Talents*; and when *that* is finish'd, our *Lord* goes on directly to speak again of the Proceedings at the last and general Judgment of the World; and, describes in plain Words, what he had before signified in the *Parable*, both the different Sentences that shall be pass'd at that Day upon the Righteous and the Wicked; and likewise the Reasons upon which these Sentences will be founded. *When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gather'd all nations, and he shall separate them, &c.* So that thus far is plain, that we are oblig'd both from what goes before the *Parable*, and from what follows after it, to understand the Rewards and Punishments, which are mentioned in this *Parable*, of the different Sentences that shall be pass'd upon those different Sorts of Servants at the Day of Judgment.

The same Thing will likewise appear evident from our Examination of the *Parable* itself, which I believe is generally, and that not very improperly, thus explain'd. God,

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* Matt. xxv. 13.

the great Lord and Proprietor of the World, intrusts various *Talents* to Men, who are all of them his *Servants*; to some more, and to others, fewer; with Design we should manage them as good Stewards, to the best Advantage we are able, during our Lives; till our Lord (to whom all Judgment hath been committed from the Father*) who is, at present, represented as at a great Distance from us, by being gone into a far Country, shall return again after a long time, to call us into his Presence at the general Judgment of the World; when he will exact an Account from all Mankind, in what Manner they have employed the several Gifts, that were bestowed upon them. And, according to the different Use we shall then be found to have made of our various *Talents*, we are told, that we shall either be approv'd and commended, with a *Well done, thou good and faithful Servant*——enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord†; or else punish'd with the wicked and slothful one; who, at the same time, that he was sentenc'd to lose the Talent he was intrusted with, was condemn'd to be cast as an unprofitable Servant into outer Darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth‡.

* John v. 22.

† Ibid. ver. 21.

‡ Ver. 30.

In this *Parable* then, when explain'd according to the common Interpretation, there is not the least Circumstance to induce us to believe any *Man may outlive his Day of Grace*, but the contrary; since all Matters are here represented as if *the wicked and unprofitable Servant*, should not have his *Talent taken from him*, till such time as he is condemn'd to begin his State of Punishment in another World. Unless any one can think, that a Sinner can be said with any Propriety, to be *cast in this Life into outer Darkneſs, where ſhall be weeping and gnawing of Teeth*; or that the *good and faithful Servant*, to whom *the Talent* was ordered to be *given*, was continued in a State of Trial, after he had already *enter'd into the Joy of his Lord*. He is ſaid, indeed, to be *made a Ruler over many things*, but we are not from hence to infer, that his Diligence and Fidelity was now to be any farther proved in the Charge committed to him; for this Expreſſion is deſign'd only to intimate to us the great Honour and Glory, which ſhould accompany the State he was now to be exalted to; nothing being more common in *Scripture*, than to find the Glory of a future Life deſcribed by the Rule and Authority, by the Thrones and Crowns, of *this*. Nobody's Memory can fail of ſuggeſting to his Mind a Multitude of Inſtances of this Nature; but becauſe one

Example must be as good as many in so plain a Case; I shall only mention the Promise made unto the Church in *Thyatira*; *He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations **. All the foregoing Considerations then put together, do even force me to interpret those Words of our *Lord* in this *Parable*: *Unto every one that bath, shall be given, &c.* of the Rewards and Punishments of another Life; tho' if there were room to apply them *here*, (as we find them used in other *Places*) to God's dealings with us in *this*, they would contain nothing in them but what all *Christians* are ready to admit of: namely, that the better or worse any one employs his Talents, the more or less Reason he has to hope for the Continuance and Increase of God's Mercies to him.

Thus far I have consider'd this *Parable* in the Sense, in which I suppose it to be most generally received. But if you desire to have my own true Sentiments upon it, tho' I agree with what has been already said, as to the explaining it of the last Judgment; yet from some Circumstances of it, I am much inclined to think, that it is so far from relating to all Mankind in general, that it was not intended by our *Lord* to be understood, like the former *Parable* of the *Virgins*,

* Rev. ii. 26,

Virgins, even of all Christians, but only of such of them as should receive the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

First, That it does not relate to all Mankind in general, I think may be gather'd from hence; because the Kingdom of Heaven, which is express'd at the beginning of the former Parable, and necessary to be understood at the beginning of this, does usually signify the Reign of the Messiah, or rather the State of the Church under his Government. And, accordingly, we find the Talents, represented as delivered to the Servants in the Parable by our Lord, and not by the Father, as they would most probably have been, had they been intended to signify God's different Dealings with Men in the different Ages of the World.

Next, that this Parable was spoken only of such Christians as should receive the extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost; my Reasons are, first, Because the Talents are here dispensed with so great a Variety, to some more, and to others fewer; when it seems as if the common and ordinary Gifts of the Spirit to every Believer, which are bestowed with a greater Equality, might, upon that Account, have been better represented by a like Number of Talents, as we find it done by our Lord in another Parable. Secondly, That Expression of giving to every Man according to his several Abilities,

ties, seems to imply, unless we can suppose all these Words to be mere Expletives, that in this Dispensation of the extraordinary Gifts conferr'd upon the first *Christians*, regard should be had to Men's former Dispositions and Abilities; so, as that every one might best employ the *Talents* he received for the general Benefit and Edification of the Church; whereas all *Christians* may be thought equally capable of receiving the ordinary and sanctifying *Graces* of the *Spirit* for their own Advantage; and, in some Degree too, for that of others. *Thirdly*, I am somewhat the more confirm'd in this Opinion, because I see this *Parable* was deliver'd by our *Lord* just before his Death, when he was more likely than at any other time, to speak of that extraordinary Effusion of the *Spirit*, he was going to receive Power from the *Father* *, to shed forth upon his *Disciples* so soon after. To which we may add *lastly*, as worth observing, that we find our *Lord* was discoursing in the latter End of the foregoing *Chapter*, more particularly of such *Servants*, as should be employ'd in the extraordinary Offices of his Church; from whence it must seem the less improbable, to think he added this *Parable* to the other, purely with Regard to them.

Now, That Expression of giving to every Man according to his several Abilities. * Acts ii. 33.

Now, Sir, if this Interpretation of mine be true, which I could produce some *Authorities* to confirm; it appears *first*, that you have cited a *Parable* to prove God *withdrew his Spirit* (or the ordinary *Assistances* of it) from some wicked *Jews*, which not only has no relation at all to the *Jews* in particular, but likewise wholly concerns the miraculous *Endowments* bestowed upon the first *Christians*. And, *Secondly*, whatever we are to understand by the *Talents* in this *Parable*; whether the ordinary, or extraordinary *Gifts* of the *Spirit*, yet I have abundantly shewn, that we are so far from having any Ground from hence to believe, that these *Talents* are *withdrawn* in this *Life*; that all the *Parts* and *Circumstances* of the *Parable* conspire to represent them as not *taken away* from any Man, till he is removed by *Death* into the other World. So that tho' I never expected to see any *Passages* produced from *Scripture* sufficient for your Purpose, yet I cannot but think it happens extremely unlucky, that you should be able to find no other *correspondent Texts* there, but such as refuse to hold any other *Correspondence* with your *Notion*, than barely as much as may serve to confute it. I dare say, if you had open'd your *Bible* at random, you would not always have far'd so ill.

But

But perhaps you mistook the *Parable* of the *Talents* for the same with *that* I hinted at before, of the *Pounds* in the 19th *Chapter* of *St. Luke*, which was spoken at a different Time and Place, of the ordinary Gifts of the *Spirit*, and has in some Circumstances of it, a more immediate relation to the *Jews*: And, if this be so, you know it won't be any great matter of Trouble, when you write next upon this Subject, to change the Word *Talents* into *Pounds*, and all will be well again; or if you like *that* better, you may order an *Errata* with such an Alteration, and then the Mistake will pass for the *Printer's* instead of yours. But if neither of these Ways should please, rather than be thought to press too hard upon you, I could be willing to oblige you so far as to grant (what I believe is more than either you, or any Man else can prove) that our *Lord* in ordering the *Talent* to be taken from the wicked and unprofitable Servant, had an Eye to the Rejection of the *Jews*, who should see the kingdom of God taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*. And if this Concession will do you any good, you are welcome to make the most of it; only I must desire you to remember, that tho' the *Jews* in general as a Nation, ceased to be God's covenanted People

* Matt. xxi. 43.

ple upon their Crucifixion of the *Messiah*, yet they were not so totally cast off, and abandoned of all the necessary Means of Salvation, but that many of them continued *daily to be added to the Church* †, till the Destruction of *Jerusalem*.

And thus I have at length done with this *Parable*, upon which though I have been much longer than was absolutely necessary, yet I hope my Time has not been altogether mis-employ'd. However that I may not seem tedious, I will endeavour to give the quicker Dispatch to what remains. I proceed then.

There are *Texts* I confess, *which speak of our grieving, and quenching the Spirit* (tho' this last if I remember right, is mentioned but once, where it relates to *propheſying* *) and that this *grieving the Spirit* may at length *provoke God to withdraw his Grace* in some measure, and for some time from us. We may *grieve a Parent* by our Undutifulness so far, as that for some time he may shew himself little concern'd about us; but a *good Parent* will never wholly cast off the Care of wicked Children, while it is in his Power to use any proper Means towards reclaiming them. And much less may we conclude, will our *heavenly Father* totally aban-

† Acts ii. 47.

* 1 Thes. v. 19.

abandon any Sinners in such a manner, as to *determine never more* to make the least Effort upon them, by those *Aids of his holy Spirit*, that are necessary to enable them to *recover themselves* out of the *Dominion of Sin and Satan*. I will still venture to say, notwithstanding any thing you have alledged to the contrary, our *natural Apprehensions of the Goodness of the Divine Nature* give us no Reason to think so; and it appears from several Instances in *Scripture*, and from *God's own Declarations* as there recorded, that he is like the good *Shepherd*, always ready to *seek* that which is *lost*, and *stands at the Door* of our Hearts, and *knocks* till we *open* to him *.

As to your last Class of *Texts which describe*, say you, *the Nature of Sin, tending always to grow more sinful*, these whatever they be, must all make against you; because if the Nature of Sin be such as to cause God at any time, so entirely to forsake us, as to leave us under an *unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*, we must from that time cease to *sin* at all, or to be any longer *accountable* Creatures. For Sin, at least such Sin as may justly render us liable to Punishment, can be nothing else, both according to our natural Notions of Guilt, and likewise

wise the Description of it in *Scripture*, but a VOLUNTARY *Transgression of the Divine Law*, which it is in our Power to avoid; unless any one can imagine, that the damned in Hell will be to all Eternity, increasing the measure of their Guilt, and consequently adding *too*, to all Eternity, to the Degrees of their Punishment. But I need labour this Point the less, because I observe from some Words of yours lower down, that we agree in our Opinion in this matter, tho' how consistently with yourself, I must leave you to enquire. The Words I refer to are these, *Despair must be a Crime in us, on the Judgment of God upon our Sins*; which do certainly imply that the Impenitence, which is the natural Consequence of that Despair, that proceeds from the *Judgment of God, or an Incapacity of Pardon upon the Account of our past Sins*, is no longer a Crime.

Nothing more remains of your *scriptural* Proof, but that we are caution'd to guard against the gradual Progress of Sin, lest any of us be harden'd thro' its Deceitfulness; * which I freely acknowledge, as what will tend to make our Salvation more dangerous and difficult; for I presume you yourself don't lay so much Stress upon the Word *harden'd*, as to imagine this implies an *Incapacity*

* Heb. iii. 13.

capacity of repenting. If you do, I must beg leave to put you in mind of some *Jews*, introduced by the *Prophet Isaiah*†, as *applying* to God for *Mercy* with great Faith and Devotion, after such time as their Heart had been once *harden'd*, and that as they say, by God too.

And now having shewn, that there is not the least Shadow of Proof in all the *Arguments* you have offer'd in defence of your *No-tion*, viz. that there is on this Side the Grave a State of absolute Reprobation, or judicial and final Obduration, that amounts to an *unalterable Incapacity of Repentance*, I might well leave Dr. *Lucas's Piece upon Despair*, in which the contrary Opinion is maintain'd, to shift for itself, without making any Defence to those doughty Exceptions you are pleas'd to take against it. And, so indeed, Necessity obliges me to do in a great Measure, for it is more than two and twenty Years since I read a Word in that *Treatise*; and being now in the Country, I find myself unable either to buy, or borrow it. I am therefore obliged in this Condition, to take for granted, that you fairly represent both the Opinion, and Words, of that *Author*. And yet I am shrewdly tempted to think, that he has not *labour'd*, as you say,

to

† Isa. lxiii. 17. *Et nunc desinam*

to prove that there can be no such State absolutely, in the Nature of Things, if God had so pleased; but rather that we have no Foundation either in Reason or *Scripture* to believe, that any Sinners will ever be permitted by him to fall into it, and be continued *here* afterwards under such an *Incapacity*; as being contrary to our Condition in this World, unsuitable to our natural Apprehensions of the divine Goodness, and inconsistent with those gracious Declarations, God has made of his Will in the *Gospel*. I am the more apt to suspect you to be guilty of a small Mistake in this Point, because, as I have before observed, you told us at your first setting out, in the Proof of your own Opinion, that *the Question was, whether there can be such a State?* and, yet afterwards, nothing less would satisfy your *Notion* of the Matter, than the *Reality* of it; supported by many glaring Facts, both in *History*, and our own *Times*. From whence I may fairly collect, that since you make no Difference on your Side of the Question, between shewing there *can be*, and that there *actually is* such a State, you may happen to mistake Dr. *Lucas's* Mind too; and think, he made no Difference neither, between *labouring to prove that there can be no such State* absolutely, and in the Nature of the Thing (I repeat it once more, because I would not be misunderstood) and only in-

tending to shew, we have no Ground to believe there *is* such a one.

But, however this be, let us see what *strange kind of Reasoning* it is from *Scripture*, you Charge upon that *Author*. I am sure it must be a *very strange kind of Reasoning*, before you can be intitled to find Fault with it, after the *correspondent Texts* you have favour'd us with, as the most proper you could find to rest your *scriptural Proof* upon. But tho' you ought to have spar'd him for your own Sake, yet since no Faults of yours can serve to justify his Reasoning to the World, if it be bad, we must venture upon the Trial of it. His *strange kind of Reasoning* according to you, consists in this; that he infers, *that because no Man can repent after Death, therefore no Man can be incapable of repenting before he is dead.* Strange kind of Reasoning indeed! And so strange, that the least Grain of Modesty, might have inclin'd you to suspect your self a little, rather than be ready to charge it upon any *excellent Writer*, as you acknowledge him to have been. But, I must not be surpriz'd at *this*, when I consider, that soon after, you accuse him of *impeaching God's Wisdom, under a Pretence of doing Honour to his Goodness*; and not only so, but of *undermining the Foundation of our Religion, by using such Arguments, in order to make it appear the more gracious, as destroy*
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the Possibility of a State of Probation and Punishment. And, after this cruel and injurious Treatment, which nothing but direct Stupidity can excuse, (as I shall shew presently) your intolerable Self-sufficiency makes you presume so far, as to think your Readers will take your Word for the rest, when you tell them, that in MANY PLACES of his Piece upon Despair, he is, as far as you can judge, SOMETIMES very inaccurate in his Reasoning, and inconsistent with himself. Really, Sir, I don't know how far your Authority might have gone in the Dark, (as to many Places, and sometimes) at least with such Persons as are of equal Parts and Learning with your self, if you had not been so fair, as to produce out of his Piece, in order to support your Charge, just as much as may serve to shew the Falshood and Injustice of it.

To return therefore to the Trial of the Fact itself: Where is the Absurdity of inferring, that because Death is called *Night* for this very Reason, because *no Man can work in it*, or do any thing towards promoting his Salvation, and opposed to the *Day* of Life for the contrary Reason, because this is the proper Season of *working*; therefore there is some *Probability* Men may continue to *work* as long as this *Day* lasts? For if this were not so, all that Part of the *Day*, wherein a Man *ceases* to be in a Capacity of *working*, might as well be called *Night* in

this Respect, as that Death which succeeds it. And not only so, but if it could be once proved, that any *Part* of the *Day* is no Season for *working*, why might we not have as good Reason to hope, that notwithstanding this *figurative* Expression, some *Part* of the *Night* may be proper for this Purpose? The Truth is, Allusions of this Nature, won't bear being strain'd one way or other; and therefore, tho' there is nothing *strange*, or absurd in this way of Reasoning; yet, I conceive, Dr. *Lucas* was too judicious a *Writer* to build more upon it, than the Strength of his Foundation would bear. And, accordingly, we find even from your own lame and imperfect Account of his *Performance*, that he was far from resting the Stress of his Cause upon this Argument, tho' such a one as carries too fair a shew of Probability with it, to be wholly omitted.

His other Arguments you tell us of, that are drawn from God's general Offers of Grace, and Pardon to all Sinners, I should think might be very strong and good; tho', you say, if they hold at all, they will hold equally against his ever punishing, or consigning Sinners over to Ruin irreversibile. As I have been us'd to think, that *Hear well, and answer well*, is a good Rule, necessary to be observ'd in all Disputes, I find myself every Moment labouring under the same Misfortune,

tune, of being at a loss how to return you an Answer, because your Words continually admit of such different Senses, that I am left much to my own Conjectures, to find out which of them you intended for *yours*. If you mean only, that *his Arguments* are so *weakly drawn*, that they prove too much, you seem unnecessarily to desert the Question, to render the Dispute personal; and I really cannot take upon my self, at this Distance of Time, to remember in what Manner they are drawn; but, till I see the contrary proved, I have a Right to suppose they are as well drawn as the Topick will admit of. And, if they are, we have no need to desire better; for God's *general Offers of Grace and Pardon to all Sinners*, will hold so far, as to prove, that it is his Desire and Design, *all Sinners should lay hold of them*; and, that for the very Reason you *next* produce from this *Treatise*; namely, that *all Grants are to be understood in the utmost Extent, unless limited expressly by the Charter*.

Here, Sir, you may likewise see the Reason, why these *general Offers* will not hold against God's punishing in the other World, because they are limited to *this*. But, if God had ever declar'd that he would make the same Offers of Grace and Pardon to all Sinners in the other World, which he has done in this; tho' I should have been unable to

to have discovered what Reason could induce a wise and good Being, to make such a Declaration before-hand, as would probably be laid hold on by Sinners to encourage themselves in their Wickedness; yet I should then have thought myself obliged to believe, that no Man would ever be concluded by God, under *an unalterable Incapacity of Repentance and Pardon*, either in this World, or *that which is to come*.

You affirm, it's true, that *the christian Charter has made express Limitations*; and, I readily allow it has; and such too, as are of the same Nature with the *tacit Exceptions* you proceed to mention, which your way of expressing yourself would almost lead one to think, you mistook for the *express Limitations* themselves. That the Reader may see I do you Justice in this Remark, I will here set down your Words in the same Order as they lie in your Paper.——But *the Christian Charter has made express Limitations*. *Tho' Pardon be offered to all Sinners, yet it means only those Sinners who Repent*. *Grace likewise is offer'd to all, but all includes only those who will accept and use it*. *His own Rule of Interpretation, as you go on, which he admits where it serves his own Hypothesis, would obviate all such Difficulties*. What *such Difficulties* refer to, as no *Difficulties* at all have been yet mention'd, does not appear: however, I shall for once leave
I you

you to explain these Words of yours, when you please your self, since I don't know any Reason, why I should be always forced to take the Pains of doing it for you. But as for Dr. *Lucas's Rule of Interpretation*, which I suppose to be what follows immediately after in your *Paper, General Expressions, in Scripture as well as in other Writings, imply Exceptions, in order to reconcile one Part with another*; I see not, why this Rule may not be admitted, with as great Safety to what you call *his Hypothesis*, in God's general Offers of Grace and Pardon to all Sinners, as in any other *Places of Scripture*, if these Offers *imply* no other *Exceptions* than what you have abovementioned; and if they do, you ought to have produc'd them.

But now we come to your last Attack upon Dr. *Lucas's Work*. You tell us, *he says farther*, and I am very much inclin'd to believe you, that *the Supposition of such a State of Reprobation and Impenitence, curtails God's Mercy*. The Reader will at first Sight, I believe, be as apt as I am, to think *these* very harmless innocent Words; and therefore must, no doubt, be very much surpriz'd, when I tell him, these are they, on which you found the whole of the cruel and injurious Charge before cited. And, as this can't but raise his Impatience, to know which way you have been able to make this Expression contain so much Poison and

Danger to the Christian Religion, I won't delay him any longer from coming to your Proof. *Very right*, say you; *i. e.* such a State of Reprobation and Impenitence, *curtails* God's Mercy; *and so does Damnation in the next Life, as well as Reprobation in this.* Pray let me intreat you, Sir, to be so good as to read Dr. Lucas's Words once more, with no other Addition to them, but what the Nature of his Argument does *absolutely* require to be here understood. *Such a State of Reprobation and Impenience* *curtails* God's (offer'd or declar'd) Mercy. Now if you can bear them, you may read your own too over again. *Very right; and so does Damnation in the next Life, as well as Reprobation in this.* Why, Sir, has God made any *Declarations*, that he will repeat his *Offers of Mercy in the next Life?* If he has, I am very ready to admit that upon this Supposition, *Damnation* in the Sense it is commonly understood, will not only *curtail*, but be *wholly inconsistent* with such *Mercy*.

But let us go on; for I am almost quite tir'd with such Stuff, and wish extremely to come to the End of it. *But it does not therefore, as the Doct̃or asserts, rob God of his Glory, unless he could prove unlimited Mercy to be always a Perfection.* Under Favour, Sir, tho' *unlimited Mercy* be not a *Perfection* (for the Word *always* seems to be re-

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dundant) yet to *curtail God's Mercy*, by adding such Limitations and Restrictions to it, which is here the Dispute, as are inconsistent with the express *Declarations*, he has made of his Nature and his Will, in his revealed *Word*, is to *rob him of his Glory*. And I have learn'd from *Scripture*, to approve and commend this Expression. If you desire to know where; to pass over all the rest, for there are innumerable *Texts*, which represent God's Mercy and Goodness, as the GLORY of the Divine Nature, I suppose it may serve well enough, to produce one Passage from the *Old Testament*, and another from the *Gospel*. When Moses desir'd to see the *Glory* of God *, he receives this Answer; That he was not able to *bear the Sight* of his *Glory* in its full Splendor, with his *bodily Eyes* †; but God promises to *make all his Goodness pass before him*, and to *proclaim the Name of the Lord before him* ‡. And accordingly, in the next Chapter, where we have an Account how this Promise was fulfilled to him, we read, *the Lord passed by before him, and proclaim'd this Description of his Divine Nature; The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression*

* Exod. xxxiii. 18.
 19.

† Ver. 20.

‡ Ver.

son and Sin *. The other *Passage* shall be produced from St. *John*, who speaks in the *first Chapter* of his *Gospel* †, of beholding the GLORY of *Jesus Christ*, as the GLORY of the only begotten of the Father, because it was full of Grace and Truth; or because our Lord did really and truly impart to *Christians*, that Grace and Mercy, which the *Jews* had only beheld the Types and Shadows of under the Law.

The rest of your *first Paper*, and some Parts of the *Second*, are bestowed in Censures upon our *Methodists*, who are a Sort of Men, I do not much approve of, because I am afraid from what I have had Opportunity to know of them, they do more Harm amongst us, than Good; and, therefore, I should be very glad, if some of the best qualified of our Clergy, would bestow some Advice and Instruction upon them, which, as they seem to be sincere Men, might be of great Service to them, and consequently to others; especially if this was done in private, by the Bishops of our Church, whose proper Business it is. And if this has been done already to no Purpose, I am as much concern'd as you can be, to think what mischievous Follies their indiscreet Zeal may be likely to lead them into.

But

* Exod, xxxiv. 6, 7.

† John i. 14.

But I cannot be of Opinion, that you can undertake this Work, with near so much Advantage as others. For tho', as you pretend, you are yet Master of so much Prudence and Charity, as not to apply your *general Doctrine* to any *particular Sinners*; yet the proceeding to *this*, in some Cases, is so very easy and natural a Step, that you seem not to have been able wholly to avoid it; or else you would never have gone about supporting your Notion by your *many glaring Facts, both in History, and our own Times*. And you will find, whenever you enter into Dispute with these Men, that they will make great Use of this Concession of yours; and that you have, by your own Doctrine, disarm'd your self, in a great Measure, of the best Arguments, that ought to be used upon that Occasion.

Neither do I see, how you can ever be able to apply your self, with great hopes of Success, to any Sinners, that are *struck with such a Sense* of the Greatness of their Crimes, as to fear *God has wholly forsaken them*. For when they have once learn'd from you, that there may sometimes be just Grounds for such Despair, it will be next to impossible for you afterwards to convince them, of what by your own Principles, you your self can never be sure of, that the Sentence of *absolute Reprobation* is not yet pass'd upon them. You will advise them to make a *Judgment of their*

*their Condition, not from their present Sentiments and Disposition, in which Case they will certainly pass a Sentence of Condemnation upon themselves, but from the Religious Sentiments and Dispositions of their Minds, before they fell into their Despair **. But if this was all the Comfort I could give these unhappy Persons, and any of them should answer me, either that they were *always*, as far as they could remember, Enemies to Religion and Virtue; or, that as this State of *Reprobation* must begin sometime or other, they did not think it began, till their *former* Religious Sentiments leaving them, they were *struck* with those *desponding Thoughts*, that created their *present Terror*, I know not what Reply I should be able to make; but I hope you do, for the Sake of such of your Flock, if you have any, as may happen to want your Assistance, to restore them to some *Peace of Mind*, in so *forlorn a Condition*.

But you say in the Beginning of your *second Paper*, that if your *Notion* be, as you *verily think it is*, well-grounded, the ill use that possibly may be made of it, can be no just Reason against asserting it. Such important Points, as concern the Safety of Mankind in respect to their future State, ought not to be concealed

* See the latter End of the Second Miscellany.

cealed from them. And I think so too of all *important Points*, that are warranted by the plain and express Words of *Scripture*. But if this *Notion* be not to be found in any one clear *Passage* of *Scripture*, nor to be proved by any plain Argument from Reason, I should be apt to think, God did not intend we should presume there is any such *State*, but *kindly concealed* the Knowledge of it from us, if true, for wise and good Reasons; and therefore I should not think myself obliged, to be at any great Pains, to *publish* my own doubtful and uncertain Conjectures about it; especially when I saw, that not only an *ill Use* possibly might, but *naturally* and *probably* would, be made of it. Many have believed, that they have been able to prove from some obscure *Passages* of *Scripture*, that the *greatest* Part of Mankind, are concluded under a State of *absolute Reprobation* by the *unalterable Decrees* of God, before their Creation; and yet I dare say, you won't commend the Prudence of those who have been fond of preaching up this Doctrine to all Persons without Distinction. Suppose again, on the other hand, that some Clergyman should think he had made a Discovery, both from Reason and *Scripture*, that God is not bound to perform his Threats, and that there would be no State of Punishments, at least of *eternal* Punishments in another World; but that
after

after some time, Sinners would either be annihilated, or again admitted to a Possibility of Repentance and Pardon; can you think he ought to publish this Discovery of his, though a very *important Point*, and *such a one as concerns the Safety or Happiness of Mankind in respect to their future State*, in any Place, where he foresaw it would affect the *present Salvation* of his Hearers, and endanger their losing that *Heaven*, which is promis'd to *Christians* under the *Gospel*? Should he not rather follow the Example of our *Lord* and his *Apostles*, and like a *faithful and wise Steward* of the Trust committed to him, divide every Man his *Portion of Meat in due season*, and in such Proportions as he judges to be most proper for their Edification in Religion and Virtue? These things I offer to your Consideration, in order to induce you to weigh maturely with yourself, how far you ought to give the Reins to your Zeal in propagating this *Notion* of yours, even though you should continue to think it true. But then consider farther, if this *Notion* should prove false, as all Points may, that *cannot be determin'd by Reason*, and have no clear *Texts* to warrant them, what will you have to answer for, if you should appear at the Last Day, to have been the Cause of the groundless Despair of so much as but one single Sinner, and much more of many? As may very well happen

to be the Case, if we could suppose an Opinion so contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel, likely to make any great Progress.

So that when I reflect upon the pernicious Consequences of your *Notion*, it is wonderfully surprizing to hear you declare, that you cannot see how it is liable to worse uses than the Opinion of those who oppose it. Dr. Lucas says, as you go on, *We know not how soon during Provocations may bring our Lives and Hopes to their last Period, and tempt God, though so infinitely merciful, to pass our final and irreversible Sentence of Death and Destruction upon us.* Now, I would fain be informed, continue you, how it can be matter of Comfort to any one, if we may provoke God to pass our final and irreversible Sentence of Destruction, to think that we shall not continue here under such a State, but be sentenced to immediate Death, as well as to Damnation in the next Life. No, Sir, it is no Matter of Comfort at all; and there is no need of any, but of the contrary, for such Sinners as resolve to persist in their wicked Courses, and therefore this Danger of *immediate Death and Damnation*, which Dr. Lucas does here so well set before them, together with the much greater Difficulty of repenting, from a Continuance in Sin, though their Lives should be farther prolonged, frees that *Author's* Opinion from the least Imputation of giving any Encouragement to Sinners, to delay their

their Repentance. Thus far then, both
 your Opinions are upon the level; and I am
 glad to hear you think so, since this is to ac-
 knowledge, that the only good Use you
 could propose to make of your Opinion, is
 sufficiently provided for by his. But then
 with regard to Persons that with they could
 repent, and are afflicted and terrified with
 Doubts and Fears, whether they have not
 already offended God too far, to be assisted
 by him in this great Work, and yet are sen-
 sible that without his Aid, their own En-
 deavours must prove ineffectual; how wide
 a Difference may be discern'd between your
 Opinion, and his, in such Cases as these?
 How naturally does your *State of absolute*
Reprobation tend then to beget or increase
 Terror and Despair, in the Minds of those,
 that have the greatest need of Comfort?
 But on the contrary, how delightful and en-
 couraging must it be to a Person, in such a
 distressed Condition, to hear the *Word* of
 God pertinently urged, in order to assure
 him, that his Life is continued to this time,
 by the *long-suffering* of God, on purpose to
 lead him to Repentance, that he may not fi-
 nally perish and be condemned with a wicked
 World; but being changed and sanctified by
 the Divine Spirit, he may become a Child of
 God, and an Heir of everlasting Life?

I have

I have now finish'd all that I judge necessary to vindicate the late Dr. *Lucas's Discourse against Despair*, from all the trifling Exceptions you have made to it. But had that *Piece* been really as faulty, as you would fain have persuaded the World, it had certainly been no disadvantage to your Cause; and, at the same time, nothing more methinks than what was due to the Character of the *Author*, if you had inform'd the Publick of what you could not but know from the Title Page, that it was a *Posthumous Work*, and, as *such*, entitled to some Degrees of Allowance, because it might have been farther corrected, had it come to the Press from the *Author's* own Hands.

In the rest of your *second Paper* there are many good Things, which I have no Reason to dislike; and if I remember right, it may be possible some Parts of it were not written the worse, for the Hints you might borrow from the *Tract* so often mention'd, tho' you have not acknowledged any Obligation of that Sort, nor do I take upon me positively to charge you with any. However, I hope every Body will remember, that the Approbation I have now given to some Parts of this *Paper*, must not be construed to extend to the doubtful Expression you *there* make use of, as to some Sinners obtaining *Mercy* upon Repentance. There

are likewise two other *Passages*, which I desire your Permission to make some short Observations upon, and then I will detain you no longer, before I take my Leave.

The *first* is where you tell us of some *bold Enthusiasts*, who pass a Sentence of Damnation with less Ceremony than a well-bred Person would tell another that his Hands were dirty, and sometimes for as mere a Trifle. Now, Sir, I don't know enough of these Men, tho' I confess, I know more of them than I am pleas'd with, to be certain what *Trifles* you mean. If you mean only the slighting old Traditions, or transgressing the Commandments of Men, tho' I should not have expected such an Expression from you, yet it may pass without Censure for me: But if you meant to call *breaking one of the least Commandments* of God, as mere a Trifle as the having dirty Hands, your Fault would be such, as I should not know what Name to give it. You cannot be ignorant, that no Sin ought to be called a Trifle; since every voluntary Transgression of the Law of God, carries with it a Contempt of the Law-giver, and consequently implies in it, the highest Rebellion, as well as the vilest Ingratitude. But I cannot believe this was your Meaning, and rather think you had a good one, but possibly may have been inform'd worse of these Men than I hope they deserve.

The *second* and *last* Thing I shall take notice of in your *Papers*, is in your Exposition of 2 *Pet.* ii. 21, 22. where you have these Words. *But to humble the Presumption of those spiritually proud Enthusiasts, who imagine that after they have received the Faith, they are that Moment absolutely freed from the Guilt and Power of Sin, and consequently secured from future Relapses; this Text is an undeniable Confutation of their wicked Error, &c.* Now if you mean no more by *receiving the Faith*, than barely the embracing *Christianity* with a sincere Persuasion of its Divine Authority, and consequently with a sincere Resolution to obey the Precepts of it; yet even then you must be very ignorant of its *Doctrines*, before you can deny, that all such *Christians* are from the very *Moment* of their Baptism, *absolutely freed from the Guilt of their past Sins.* And as I suppose they cannot have the Guilt of any future Sins to answer for, before they commit them, I may safely affirm, *they are absolutely freed from the Guilt, tho' I will not add Power of Sin, for fear you should wrangle with me about the Word absolutely.*

But if you mean by *having received the Faith*, the having attain'd the utmost Degree of Faith, and consequently of Virtue, that any Persons are capable of in this World,

tho' the maintaining that such as have this Faith, are *secured from any future Relapses*, may be an *Error*, and, as far as such *Presumption* is the Cause or Effect of any *Wickedness*, may justly deserve to be accounted a *wicked Error*, yet it is not difficult to shew, you can have no right to call it so. For how easy would it be, to prove the *Reality* of such a confirm'd State of Faith and Virtue, as can be liable to no *Relapses*, if one may be allowed to follow the same Method you have taken for defending your *State of absolute Reprobation*, or of a *judicial and final Obduration*, and then call it a sufficient *Proof* of the former? Don't be startled, Sir, with imagining I am going to make a *minute Repetition* of your Arguments all over again; for I do not like them well enough, to endure to do *that* myself, and much less to think of making this *Letter* so tedious to any of my *Readers*. No, Sir, I will dispatch in a Moment, as thus.

Such a State, tho' a *Point that cannot be determin'd by Reason*, is yet very agreeable to our *natural Notions of God and his Attributes*. It contains nothing in it contrary to *strict Justice*, and how far the *Wisdom of God* may induce him to extend his *Goodness*, we for want of *infinite Knowledge* can be no proper Judges; only it seems very probable, because it would be to a very good Purpose.

And

And it is certain, no one can dispute his Almighty Power to be sufficient to preserve any Man from Sin, if he thinks fit to exert it for this End. But then we are to enquire farther, how this Matter stands upon the Foot of Scripture, from God's Declaration, and Methods of Procedure, as recorded there; And here it appears by Scripture and (I must add because you do) Experience, from God's Proceedings with the Heathens, Jews, and Christians, that he governs the moral, as well as the natural World, by general, stated Laws; so that it is his settled Course of Providence to give more and more Grace, to those that have used his first Gifts well. This Method of Proof, tho' not the common one, ought to be preferr'd before resting the Cause upon the Interpretation of particular Passages of Scripture which may be controverted; because here we argue upon such general Principles, both natural and scriptural, as must be admitted by all Christians. However, I am able to produce some Texts of Scripture, which, I must think satisfactory, as being perfectly correspondent with this Notion: — Such as, Christ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified: — Such as, those Elect (your own English) whom our Saviour mentioned as Persons that could not possibly be deceived, and the Apostle speaks of as not to be separated by Death nor Life, nor Angels, nor Devils

nor any other Creature, from the Love of God which is in Christ:— and those Jews (you will remember I am not serious) to whom, as we are inform'd by the Parable of the Talents, God order'd another Talent of the Spirit to be given, tho' they had ten Talents of it before; declaring, that unto every one that hath (N.B.) improved the Spirit, shall be given, and he shall have abundance.—Such as those, which speak of our being strengthen'd by the Spirit of God, with Might in the inner Man; which imply, that when we are thus sealed by the Spirit of our God, unto the Day of Redemption, we may by this Means be so rooted and grounded in Love, as not to be any more liable to be tossed to and fro' by the Assault of Temptation:—Such, again, as those which describe the Nature of Religion and Virtue, tending always to increase and press forwards; for which Reason, we are exhorted to go on unto Perfection; and, in a word, to be perfect even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

Pray, Sir, tell me, may I not venture to say now, that it must be a very plain Text indeed, and incapable of any other Construction, that can outweigh the Arguments I have offer'd in Defence of this Notion? Especially, when I add to all this, the many glaring Facts that support the Reality of such a State. Women, and Children, have chosen Death, usher'd in by the severest Torments that

that could accompany it, rather than give up their Faith, or lose their Virtue. And surely, the Heroical Constancy of such weak and tender Minds must have something peculiar in it. They were more likely of themselves to have sunk with Fear and Melancholy at the terrible Apprehensions of what they were going to suffer, than to have spoken and acted with the holy Confidence we read of; but because they had made a good Use of the common and ordinary Gifts of the Spirit, they seem to have been preserved from the Weakness natural to their Sex and Age, by the extraordinary Assistance of the Holy Ghost, which is more than a Match for all our Enemies, and so were kept by the invincible Power of God through Faith unto Salvation. And here I stop, having already brought as much Proof for the one State, as you for the other; lest this wanton Play of my Pen, should incur Censure from some, and be mistaken for Earnest by others.

I have done, Sir, with the Trouble I have now given you, and tho' I did not find it altogether so difficult to write these Papers, as you declare you did yours; yet I am not so much in love with this manner of employing myself, as to desire any more of the same Trouble. And therefore for this, and other Reasons I could give you, I hope you will take warning from hence, neither to

advance any more pernicious Opinions, nor
 ever to reflect again by Name upon better
 Men than myself. This is what I am
 now fully sensible of, and that you have likewise
 received Correction for it. But tho' you
 have still persisted in this Fault, yet since I
 see no Reason to believe either you or
 any other Person to be under a judicial Inca-
 pacity of amending, I have much better
 Hopes of you, than your repeated Offences
 of this Nature would otherwise admit of.

April 9.
 1739.

Your very humble Servant





more than once, and that you have likewise
*A Discourse concerning Reprobation and Fi-
 nal Impenitence; occasion'd by a History
 of the Behaviour of an Atheist on his Death-
 bed, as published in N^o CCCXIX, and re-
 printed in N^o CCCXXI.*

SIR,

I NOW beg the Favour of you to insert some Re-
 marks, occasion'd by the melancholy *Narrative*,
 lately publish'd in your Paper N^o CCCXXI, of an un-
 happy Gentleman who lived many Years an *Infidel*, and
 died a *Believer*, but not a *Penitent*; convinc'd of the
 Truth of a Future State, and of his own miserable Por-
 tion in it.

Before I enter upon what I intend to make the main
 Subject of my Letter I would recommend one Observa-
 tion to *profess'd Infidels*. Unless they are peremptorily
 resolv'd to reject all *Reason* as well as *Revelation*, I am
 sure, it merits a serious Thought. They would seem
 to be *thoroughly settled* in their Disbelief of a future State,
 and act upon it without any manner of *Doubt*, as if it
 were a *very clear Point*. The opposite Opinion, tho'
 it has, and ever had, the greatest *Numbers* on its Side,
 they resolve into the *Wickedness* of Men's Understand-
 ings, or the *Prejudices* of Education; but *they*, having
 a peculiar Strength of Genius and Greatness of Mind,
 have been able to discover the *Cheat*, which *Cunning*
 invented, and *Superstition* has continued.—At present,
 I am disposed to allow as much as they can possibly be
 inclin'd to demand, as due to the Superiority of their
 Capacity, because it will appear in Evidence against
 them. There is no denying but that *many*, I may safely
 add,

add, *most* of their *greatest* Men have owned their Conviction, at a Time when their Peace of Mind would have induc'd them, if possible, to have retain'd their *Infidel* Opinions; and their Credit with their Party was a strong Motive to a *Concealment* of the Alteration of their Sentiments. This, I say, having been the Case of so many of them, it should, in common Prudence, make them *distrust* the Truth of their present Opinion, and *doubt*, at least, whether *they*, as many others have done before them, may not (and perhaps too late,) change their Notions, and go out of this Life under great *Terrors*, if not in utter *Despair*; the natural Consequence of which *Distrust* will be, (if they act *rationally*) that they will *immediately* re-consider the Point with all possible Care and Impartiality, before they venture their All, an *Eternity* upon it. And to encourage them to do it, I shall examine the Question, naturally suggested to us by the *Narrative*, and consider how far the Determination of it will affect *them* in particular.

The Question is, whether there can be any such Case in this Life as that unhappy Gentleman apprehended and declar'd himself to be in; a State of *absolute Reprobation*, or *judicial* and *final Obduration*; an *unalterable Incapacity* of *Repentance*; and, consequently, of *Pardon*.

This is a Point of such Importance to present Peace and future Security that we cannot attend to it with more Exactness and Accuracy than it deserves; and it is of so difficult a Nature, upon which our most able and learned Divines have so much differ'd in their Opinions and Explanations, that I have an equitable Claim to the Candour and Pardon of my Readers, if they should not agree with me in Opinion. I flatter myself that I shall offer some Things that may be of use towards a better Determination of the Matter, tho' I *should* be mistaken in my Notion; and I should be thankful to any one, for my own Satisfaction as well as for the Information of the Publick, who shall send me a better State of the Case.

Tho' this Point cannot be determin'd by *Reason*, yet we must first consider whether it be agreeable to our *natural*

tural Notions of God and his *Attributes*, since no Interpretation of *Scripture* ought to be admitted which is plainly repugnant to them. The *revealed Will* of God can never contradict his *Nature*. His *Will* is only the *Result* of his *Nature*.

But I do not see how the Notion, now under Consideration, any ways disagrees with our natural Apprehensions of the *Divine Nature*. For, it supposes that before God gives any one up to this *final Obduracy* and *Impenitence*, as a Punishment of his *Obstinacy* in *Infidelity* or *Wickedness*, that he had given him *sufficient Means* of Conviction and Reformation. This is enough to clear the *Justice* of God. If Men *wilfully* and *habitually* neglect, or abuse them, there can be no *Injustice*. If God refuses to offer again what has been so often slighted. To say otherwise, is to say, that it is *unjust* in God to put us into a State of *Trial* and *Probation* at all. For, if God be obliged to give us *more than sufficient Means* of Conviction and Reformation, in a *rational Way*, and consistent with the *Freedom* of Man's *Will*, he must be obliged to grant *such a Degree* of Evidence as will *necessarily enforce* Faith, and *such a Degree* of Grace as will *compel* Men to be good. This *rational Evidence* then, and *Sufficiency* of Grace may have been rejected and withstood *before* Death, and consequently, notwithstanding any thing arising from *strict Justice*, a Man may *outlive* his Day of Grace and be given up, *judicially*, to *final Obduracy* and *Impenitence*. As to God's *Goodness*, how long that will induce him to bear with obstinate *Infidelity*, or *Wickedness*, before he *totally* withdraws his Grace, this must be determin'd only by *Wisdom*, of which we, for want of *infinite Knowledge*, can be no proper Judges; neither has he thought fit to *reveal* it to us in his Word, tho' the *general Doctrine* may be gather'd from thence. That is, we may be able, perhaps, to prove the *Fact*, that God Almighty *does* sometimes *finally* withdraw his Grace, tho' he has not afforded us any *Criteria* whereby we can pronounce with certainty upon any *particular Person* that he is in that State. — Now let us enquire how the Matter stands upon the Foot of *Scripture*, from God's *Declarations*,

Declarations, and Methods of Procedure, as recorded there.

But I would first observe, that the Question is not whether God cannot by his *Almighty Power* so far alter the Nature and habitual Disposition of a Man as to convince the most obstinate Infidel of the Truth of Religion, and soften the most hardened Sinner into Repentance and the Love of Virtue. There is no doubt but that he who made our Faculties and Wills can influence and change them at Pleasure. Neither are we to consider what God, as the *absolute Governor*, MAY do, by a *Prerogative Act*; or whether, in some few particular Instances, for Reasons infinitely Wise, tho' unknown to us, he has not *actually* exercised such a Sovereign Authority. If he *has*, (which however, does not appear, neither does it seem to be likely) these were not properly Acts of God's *Mercy and Goodness*, which Attributes would always operate *equally* towards Objects in the *same Circumstances*; but of his *Wisdom* to serve some great Purposes of *Government*; and consequently, we cannot argue from what he *may have* done in one Case to what he *will* do in another. God governs the *moral* as well as the *natural* World, by *general, stated* Laws, and it is from *them only* that we can reason conclusively in Points of this Nature. To *some* People he has afforded greater Degrees of Light and Assistance than to others; to one Age than to another; but to all, enough to make them *accountable* to him for their Conduct. That *particular* Dispensation which infinite *Wisdom* saw expedient, upon the Whole, for any Age, or People, is the *standing ordinary* Rule of his *Goodness*. No Age, or People having a Right to demand more than *strict Justice* can require, they have no reason to expect more than *Wisdom* has appointed; nor any reason to complain if God does not give it them. The *Heathens* had less Light and Grace imparted to them than God's *peculiar People*. Among the *latter* there were different Degrees under different Dispensations. The *Christian* Dispensation exceeds every other in *Fulness of Grace and Truth*. ALL Mankind were govern'd, and will be tried, by their *own particular* Rule and Measure. The *lowest* in
the

the Oeconomy of God's Providence had enough given them to render them *punishable*; and if they neglected to improve what was *appointed* them, as their *standing Measure*, *extraordinary Favours* were not to be look'd for. — Let us, now, bring this general Doctrine, of God's governing the World by *stated* and *fixed Laws*, to the Point under Consideration. The *Christian Dispensation*, tho' it affords us greater Means than was granted by any other, yet, like all others, it dispenses them under the Regulation of *establish'd Rules*; and a *Christian* has no more Right to demand, or Reason to expect Favours *beyond* the *stated Rule* and Measure at first *establish'd* by God, than a *Jew* could have claimed or expected what the *Gospel Covenant* imparts, or an *Heathen* have demanded or expected the *superior Advantages* allowed to the *Jews*; and if any Persons will not be influenc'd by the *standing, ordinary Means* appointed for *Christians* in general, they have no more Right to require, or Reason to expect *singular Favours*, beyond the *appointed Measure*, than *Jews* or *Heathens*, who liv'd *before* the Times of the *Gospel*, cou'd have claim'd or expected the *standing, ordinary Means* afforded under it. This being the Case; it appearing both from *Scripture* and *Experience* that there has been always a *settled Course* of Providence, from which it did not depart but on some very *extraordinary Occasions* respecting the great Ends of Government; and that in Consequence of this *establish'd Method* of Government, *Christians* in general, who slight the *ordinary Means* of Grace appointed for them, have no *Title* to *extraordinary ones*, nor any Ground of Hope that God will grant them; from these Principles, I think, it will follow that whenever God sees that any Persons will not be converted to the *Christian Faith*, or influenc'd to obey the *Christian Precepts*, in the Way which is *establish'd* by his Wisdom, it seems not only *just* in God to withdraw the *common Influences* of his Spirit, but an Act of wise Government to do it; as it wou'd be thought highly *reasonable* and becoming a *prudent Man* not to continue to throw away Advice, Reproof, or Assistance upon any one after he is thoroughly convinc'd

vinc'd that the Person will never be the better for it. It can never be an Act of *Wisdom* to do any thing to no good Purpose, and therefore whenever any Man ceases to be capable of being influenced by God's ordinary Grace, God must withdraw it wholly, or continue to offer it when he knows that it will be refus'd, which is offering it to no Purpose. The only Thing that could be effectual towards this Person's Salvation, upon the Terms of the *Christian Covenant*, would be to apply extraordinary, that is, uncommon Assistances; but then this being contrary to the Rule establish'd by God, for the general Dispensation of his Grace, it can never be consistent with his *Wisdom* to grant what his *Wisdom* had before determin'd to be improper, and consequently resolv'd not to grant. Now, will any one say that a *Christian* cannot, before Death, bring himself into such a State as to be above the Influence of the ordinary Means of Grace? This is absurd, unless we suppose, what is equally absurd, and that is, that the ordinary Means of Grace under the Gospel supercede and destroy *Free-Will*; or that, tho' Men continue *Free Agents*, at liberty to neglect and abuse those Means, yet that none of them do it. Or will any pretend that God cannot tell when Men are in such a State, as we are speaking of? This is *Blasphemy*. Nothing, then, can be said, but what has been already disprov'd, and that is, that when Men have so far slighted and abus'd the ordinary Means as to be above their Influence, God will apply extraordinary ones, or, what is as flatly contrary to *Scripture* and *common Sense* as it is to his Method of Government under all other Dispensations, viz. that under the Gospel he observes no ordinary stated Method at all in the Dispensation of his Grace. — From what has been offer'd, therefore, it appears clear, that, in the Nature of Things, considering *Christians* as in State of *Probation* and *Free Agency* capable of abusing spiritual Blessings, and God as a wise Governor steadily observing his establish'd Rules of Government, a State of *Reprobation* and *final Impenitence* must often happen, tho' we cannot tell when such Cases do happen; and God has kindly conceal'd the Time of our spiritual as well as natural Death,

that

that all Men may continually be upon their Guard, and keep with a trembling Caution at the greatest distance from Danger, by not daring wilfully to oppose the Motions of his Spirit, or to act contrary to plain Laws. I chose to proceed in this Method of Proof, tho' not the common one, because *here* we argue upon such *general Principles*, both *natural* and *scriptural*, as must be admitted by *all* Christians, rather than rest the Cause upon the Interpretation of *particular Passages* of Scripture which may be controverted, tho' I must think some of them *satisfactory*, as being perfectly correspondent with this Notion: — Such as, *My Spirit shall not always strive with Man*: — Such as, those *Heathens* whom St. Paul says, *God gave over to a reprobate Mind*, because they did not make the proper Use of those Means which *Natural Religion* afforded them: — and those *Jews* from whom, as we are inform'd by the *Parable of the Talents*, God withdrew his Spirit, because they had not improv'd it. — Such as those which speak of our *grieving* and *quenching the Spirit*; which imply that we may by an obstinate Resistance provoke God to withdraw his Grace: — Such, again, as those which describe the *Nature of Sin*, tending always to grow more sinful; for which Reason we are caution'd to guard against its gradual Progress, lest any of us be *hardened thro' its Deceitfulness*: — Dr. Lucas (who has labour'd to prove that there can be no such State, on this side the Grave, as an utter Incapacity of Repentance) confesses, that *CRYING Sins do naturally tend to ALIENATE us from God*; and that, if persisted in, *they may EFFACE and OBLITERATE all Distinctions of Good and Evil*. He owns, farther, *that the Spirit of God may be WEARIED OUT, and that God may SEAL UP a Sinner under the Doom of Ruin*. But, then, because this Life is said to be the *Day of Working*, and that after Death the *Night* cometh wherein no Man can Work, he thence argues that a Man cannot *outlive* his Day of Grace, and that whenever God determines *finally* to withdraw his Grace from any Man he determines the *immediate Death* of that Man. But this is strange kind of Reasoning in so excellent a Writer. For how does
it

it follow that, because no Man can repent *after* Death, therefore no Man can be incapable of Repenting *before* he is dead. Why must this Incapacity commence just at the Time of his Expiration? Why not sooner, since it might naturally arise sooner from the Causes that produce it? Or why must we suppose God, the Moment it does happen, to destroy the Man, since he may have wise Reasons for continuing him some Time *here* in such a State of Impenitence, as well as for suffering him after Death to continue in it to all Eternity? His Arguments, drawn from the general Offers of *Grace* and *Pardon* to all Sinners, if they hold at all, will hold equally against ever punishing; for if God may at all, if he ever may, consign Sinners over to Ruin *irreversible*, he may do it whenever they have refused all those Offers of Life, which the unerring Wisdom of God thought sufficient to be made; and that might happen ten or twenty Years before the Period of *natural* Life, as well as at any other Time; unless you resolve Mens Impenitence into the *Will of God*, as the efficient Cause of it, and that he *never does Will* it till the very Moment of our Death. — He says, all *Grants* are to be understood in the utmost Extent unless limited *expressly* by the Charter. True, but the *Christian* Charter has made *express* Limitations. Tho' Pardon be offer'd to all Sinners, yet it means only those Sinners who *Repent*. *Grace*, likewise, is offer'd to *all*, but *all* includes only those who will accept and use it. His own Rule of Interpretation, which he admits where it serves his own Hypothesis, would obviate all such Difficulties. *General Expressions*, in *Scripture* as well as in other Writings, imply Exceptions, in order to reconcile one Part with another; as, when all *Whoremongers* and *Adulterers* are, in absolute Terms, sentenced to Damnation, we know from other plain Passages, that it must be *restrain'd* to such only as do not Repent. Unless the Bible be interpreted in this Manner, (which is a very rational one) you'll make it full of Inconsistences. — He says, farther, the Supposition of such a State of *Reprobation* and *Impenitence* CURTAILS God's Mercy. Very right; and so does *Damnation* in the next Life, as well

as *Reprobation* in this. But it does not therefore as the Doctor asserts, *imply* God of this *Glory* unless he could prove *unlimited Mercy* to be always a *Perfection* which, indeed, would be to the Purpose of his Argument, but contrary to that good Man's Design. The *Christian Covenant* is the most merciful of any, as it has ascertain'd to us more clearly, than any other, Forgiveness upon *Repentance*, and affords us larger Degrees of *Grace* to enable us to *repent*; and we must not, under a Pretence of doing Honour to God's *Goodness*, impeach his *Wisdom*; and, in order to make our Religion appear the more *gracious*, undermine the Foundation of it, by using such Arguments, as destroy the possibility of a State of *Probation* and *Punishment*. This Gentleman was not only a *pious Christian*, but a good *Writer*, and yet in many Places of his Piece upon *Despair* he is, as far as I can judge, sometimes very inaccurate in his Reasoning and inconsistent with himself. Whether I have prov'd my Point to Satisfaction, or not, this I will presume to say, no-body can *disprove* it. The worthy Gentleman, above-mention'd, says, if any one can produce a plain Text *for* it, he will give it up. And if any one can produce a plain Text *against* it, I will no longer contend for it. But then, it must be very plain indeed, and incapable of any other Construction, before it can outweigh the Arguments I have offer'd in defence of it. — And the Notion, if not contrary to Scripture, will appear the more probable for having so many glaring Facts to support it. History has recorded some, and our own Times have supplied us with others, that carried with them all possible appearance of Reality. — The unhappy Gentleman, who gave Occasion to this Letter, as far as his Friends could judge of him, or he could judge of himself, was *judiciously* struck with a Sense of his Condition, as an Example and Warning to others. — *Bunworth*, a bloody Villain who suffer'd at *Kingston* with *Bluett*, &c. told Dr. Bennet (as I was inform'd by one of the Doctor's Friends) much the same Things that the other despairing Wretch urg'd against himself. Says he, *I know that the Gospel promises Pardon to all Sinners that repent, but I cannot repent. I am*

as hard (clapping his Hand upon his Breast) as a Rock. God has given me up, and I hate him and Virtue too. The Desperation of these bold Spirits has something peculiar in it. They were more likely to run into *Presumption* and too much *Confidence*, than to sink into Fear and Melancholy, or to be filled with superstitious Apprehensions. Neither was there any reason to think they were *Distracted*, because they talk'd rationally and pertinently. They seem'd to have been roused from their harden'd Insensibility by the awaken'd Hand of *Vengeance*; and convicted, tho' not soften'd. — But since God does not give us any certain Criterions whereby to judge, we are never warrant'd to pronounce an absolute Sentence. These Examples were not intended by Providence as Opportunities for rash Condemnation of the unhappy Sufferers, but as a kind Caution to ourselves, lest we also should fall into the same Circumstances of Hardness and Horror. In the most desperate Cases it is our Business to press them, with the utmost Importunity and Tenderness, to apply themselves to the Throne of Mercy; to endeavour to kindle up some sparks of the holy Love of God and Virtue, by shewing the Reasonableness of the one, and the amiable Attributes of the other. They are to be caution'd against being too ready to admit particular Impulses and private Impressions upon the Mind for divine Revelations, since in many Cases such desponding Thoughts are the Dictates of Melancholy, or the Suggestions of the Devil. — We have some *Spiritual Empiricks* who think *Despair* (which must be a Crime in us, or the Judgment of God upon our Sins) a most promising Symptom of *Salvation*; and accordingly they send People to *Bedlam*, there to repent when they have lost their Senses. And if they had the use of their Reason, they would hardly be the more hasty to return to God, for being perswaded that he would reject them, or to implore his Mercy because they did not hope for any. Such rash Pretenders, who thunder out Damnation at random, without Study, without Experience, without Thought or Judgment, deserve to be punish'd, much more than ignorant *Licentiates* merit the Censure of the College for *Mal-Practice*; and

as far as any of us in our several Stations neglect to prevent, by all lawful Means, the Havock they make amongst weak People, we are so far answerable for the Ruin of Families as to their Temporal Welfare, and, what, is much more affecting to humane Dispositions, for the Peace of many innocent Minds. — As soon as Time will permit, you shall receive another Letter, wherein I shall consider how far our *Infidels* and *Profligates* in particular, and how far *Christians* in general are concern'd in this Case. In the mean while I desire and hope that no Persons will give way to any frightful Imaginations till they have heard the whole of what I have to offer. — In this next Letter I shall have occasion to take notice of those Texts, upon which some have unhappily, but without good Reason, grounded their Despair.

Yours, &c.

The Continuation and Conclusion of a Discourse concerning Reprobation and final Impenitence.

S I R,

IN my former Letter in proof of this Notion, I did not proceed upon the Authority of those Texts of Scripture which respect particular Sins, or Persons, but on such *general allowed* Principles as have their Foundation in the Consideration of a State of Tryal and Probation; the usual Methods of God's Government of the moral World; the Nature of Sin as it is describ'd in Holy Writ, and felt by ourselves, tending always towards hardness of Heart; and the declared Rules which God observes in giving, withdrawing and withholding his Grace. If the Notion be, as I verily think it is, thus well grounded, the ill Use that *possibly* may be made of it, can be no just Reason against asserting it. Such important Points, as concern the Safety of Mankind in respect to their future State, ought not to be conceal'd

from them. But I cannot see how it is liable to worse Uses than the Opinion of those who oppose it. Dr. Lucas says, ' We know not how soon daring Provocations may bring our Lives and Hopes to their last Period, and tempt God, tho' so infinitely merciful, to pass our final and irreversibile Sentence of Death and Destruction upon us.' Now, I would fain be informed, how it can be Matter of Comfort to any one, if we may provoke God to pass our final and irreversibile Sentence of Destruction, to think that we shall not continue here under such a State, but be sentenc'd to immediate Death, as well as to Damnation in the next Life. And as to the manner of treating this tender Subject, I do humbly conceive that mine is the least likely to drive People into Despair. If I had attempted to shew, as some others have done, that any particular Sins are incapable of being repented of, melancholly Persons might fancy they see a Resemblance between those Sins and their own, but in my way of stating the Doctrine of final Reprobation and Impenitence there can be no reasonable Ground to think ourselves finally harden'd while we feel in our Minds any Love of God and Virtue; or that we are excluded all Hopes of Pardon while we can bring ourselves to pray for it; those inward Convictions of the Reasonableness of God's Laws, and our readiness to approach the Throne of Grace and Mercy being just Reasons for thinking that we are not quite harden'd by our Sins and forsaken of God. Subjects of this kind ought to be managed with all imaginable Caution lest they should occasion Dependence on the one hand, or Presumption on the other. To mislead the Confident into a mistaken Security, or the tender and scrupulous Conscience into the horrors of Despair, such a Thought is enough to make a Man tremble while he writes; and I wish I could say any thing that could make an Impression upon those bold Enthusiasts who dare to denounce the Terrors of the Lord with so much Freedom, and so little Discretion; to pass a Sentence of Damnation with less Ceremony than a well-bred Person would tell another that his Hands were dirty, and sometimes for as mere a Trifle. If I could offer any thing that might direct the wander-
ing

ing Steps of a Traveller towards Eternity into the middle Road between the two fatal Extremes; If I could give Comfort to an honest Mind labouring under the Weight of mistaken Fears, if by exciting well-grounded Hopes I could encourage the Profligate to return to his Duty and endeavour to make his Peace with his offended Maker; while I can flatter myself with such an Expectation, it is impossible for me to express the Satisfaction that I feel. With this charitable View I undertook to write these difficult Papers, with a Caution becoming a Matter of such infinite Concern I have weigh'd every thing that I have ventured to offer, and may the Success be answerable to the good nature of my Intentions!

Judicial Obduration, as before stated, is not an Infusion of any evil Qualities, nor any positive Act of the Divine Will upon our Minds, but only God's ceasing to act upon them by the Operations of his Spirit, and leaving an evil Heart of Unbelief, vicious Inclinations and the Suggestions of wicked Spirits to produce their natural Effects. — *Final Obduration* is, when God determines never more to afford us these Aids of his Holy Spirit. But, as no Person is left thus defenceless under the absolute Dominion of Sin and Satan while he is capable of being influenc'd by the ordinary Assistances of Grace, we cannot absolutely pronounce any particular Person to be in such a State of utter Dereliction, no not tho' he be notoriously wicked and living as it were without God in the World, because we can never tell when a Sinner is out of the reach of those Influences. God forbid that I should attempt to lessen the Malignancy, or the Danger of Crying Sins, especially if repeated. *Habits* are still of a more hardening Nature; and it is so difficult for those who are under the Power of them to free themselves from their Servitude, that it is represented in Scripture as an *Impossibility*; like that of changing the Nature of any thing. But such Expressions are to be understood in a qualified Sense. They only mean to represent that *Habits* grow, as it were, into the original Constitution of our Bodies and Temper of our Minds, thus becoming part of our Nature; that it is exceeding difficult, and a Work of Time (not an instantaneous Effect) to eradicate

such Dispositions; consequently, that such enslaved Persons are in the utmost Danger of having their Consciences sear'd, and of being given up to a reprobate Mind, after the Efforts of God's Grace become ineffectual. *Confirmed Infidelity*, especially after having been born and educated in a *Christian Country* in the *Christian Faith*; rooted and grounded in its Principles, under all the appointed Means of Improvement in Christian Knowledge; this, likewise, is a State of the blackest Guilt and the greatest Danger, because such Persons cannot have stronger Reasons for believing *Christianity* than they have rejected, or stronger Assistances from the *Holy Ghost* than they have resisted: yet still it does not follow that the same Evidence will not appear stronger to the Mind at one Time than at another, and the same degree of Grace be more influential on it under some Circumstances than under others; and therefore, we cannot be sure that they are got beyond all Influence in the *ordinary* Way of conveying it; till which Time we have reason to believe that God will not *finally* withdraw it. — We know not the various Circumstances and Incidents of a Man's Life, the early Impressions that might give a Turn to his Sentiments and Dispositions, the Violence of a Temptation that might surprize him in an unguarded Moment, the Concurrence of natural Temper and occasional Inclinations, or the train and series of Casualties, that might conspire to seduce him gradually into Unbelief, or Impiety, before he came to Maturity of Judgment, or had proper Opportunities of enquiring into the Grounds of Religion, or acquiring virtuous Notions, thro' the Neglect of Parents and Guardians in his Education, thro' the malicious Artifices of Infidels and Debauchees to corrupt his Principles. How differently may such a one come to think and be inclin'd to act under a Change of Constitution, of Situation, of Opportunities, of Conviction and Improvement, from Reproof, Exhortation, and Arguments casually, or by the kind Hand of Providence thrown in his Way? Such an unhappy Captive to Infidelity and Vice, made a Slave in his *Youth*, I had almost said in his *Childhood*, unwarily betrayed by the Enemy under a Pretence of Friendship,

Friendship, tho' he was initiated into our Religion by the Rite of Baptism, yet as to any personal and rational Acts, he may still be an *Infant in Christian Knowledge*, and unacquainted with *Christian Graces*. — I do not mean to justify any Man in a Christian Country for not enquiring into the Reasons of that Religion, which has been receiv'd for above 17 Centuries by the most learned and inquisitive Men, and is establish'd by the Wisdom of his own Country. His Crime is inexcusable, and his Case desperate. He neglects to examine into the Truth of a Question, the most deserving the strictest Search. This is Folly. This is Madness. He is under such strong Prejudices as blind his Eyes, or hinder his opening them; he is under the Dominion of such inveterate Habits as render him averse to all the Means of Information, and Grace. This is his Misfortune, this his unhappy Fate. But still, I say, as he has not fin'd against such clear Conviction, as many other Apostates and Reprobates have done, nor tasted so much of the heavenly Powers; he has not done such despite to God's Holy Spirit, and God in his Goodness, and by his Wisdom, may give him such Means of Conviction and Reformation as may prove effectual. — The Sin of those who have fallen from Faith or Grace, after an early and habitual Piety for a Course of many Years, after clear and strong Conviction of the Truth of Christianity, especially if they have afterwards made it their Study and Business by Conversation and Books to corrupt others, and that too in the coolest and most deliberate Manner; the Sin, I say, of these Wretches is most exceeding sinful, and their Case the most desperate that can be conceiv'd on this side Hell. Yet even for *these* I would fain believe there is still room for Mercy, if they can apply for it, and I wish it were in my Power to persuade them to try immediately; tho' I have too much reason to fear, this my *Christian Compassion*, my sincere Tenderness of *Humanity*, will meet with the usual Return of insolent Scorn. — There are two or three Texts relating to *Apostates*, which have been usually urg'd by them in Despair, but not usually so clearly explain'd to them as they might have been. — 2 *Ep. of*

Pa. ii. v. 21, 22. 'For, if after they have escap'd
 ' the Pollutions of the World, thro' the Knowledge of
 ' the Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ*, they are again en-
 ' tangled therein and overcome, the latter End is worse
 ' with them than the Beginning. For, it had been bet-
 ' ter for them not to have known the Way of Righte-
 ' ousness, than after they have known it to turn from
 ' the Holy Commandment deliver'd unto them.' The
 Sense of which is evidently no more than this, that the
 Case of an *Apostate CHRISTIAN* is much worse than
 that of an unconverted *Jew* or *Pagan*. But, to hum-
 ble the Presumption of those *spiritually* proud *Enthusiasts*,
 who imagine that after they have receiv'd the Faith, they
 are that Moment absolutely freed from the Guilt and
 Power of Sin, and consequently secur'd from future Re-
 lapses, this Text is an undeniable Confutation of their
 wicked Error, as it shews not only that they are liable
 to Sin, but even to fall away from their *Christian* Faith,
 and turn *Infidels*. *Heb. vi. 4, 5.* may seem to be strong-
 er. — The Words are, 'For it is impossible for those
 ' who were once enlighten'd, &c. if they shall fall away,
 ' or as it is in the Original, and are fallen, *καὶ ὁπίσσω*,
 ' to renew them again to Repentance.' This is a fresh
 Proof that, not only *Christians*, but that *Christians* once
 endowed with the *miraculous* Powers of the *Holy Ghost*,
 might *Apostatise*. But it is not so clear a Proof that such
Apostates are *incapable of Repentance*. For, *Impossible*,
 agreeably to the Scripture manner of Expression, might,
 without any Force upon the natural Sense of the Word,
 signify only *great Difficulty*; and *Dr. Wall*, upon the
 Place, has shewn from the Context that *St. Paul* meant,
 that it was impossible for *him* to use to such any Argu-
 ments that could have Force enough to reclaim them;
 not that it was impossible for *God* to do it, either by his
 Terrors on their Conscience, or by his Judgments, or
 by his Spirit on their Hearts. As the judicious Critic ob-
 serves, it is the same way of speaking as is used by a
Physician that gives over a Patient who will not take his
 Medicines, or a *Father* an incorrigible Son, saying, *I*
can do no more for him, not meaning that it is *absolutely*
impossible that the Patient should recover or the Son be
 reclaim'd.

reclaim'd. The next Place, thus misapplied is *Heb. x. 26.* 'If we Sin wilfully after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins.' — But it is not here said there remaineth no more Pardon for Sinners, but no more, or no other Sacrifice for SINS; there is not another Sacrifice yet to be offer'd. He had said before, *u. 14.* By one Offering he hath perfected, &c. and the same had been said before, *c. ix. 26.* and *Rom. vi. 10.* all therefore that he says here is, to admonish the Christians not to sin wilfully (and especially not to Apostatise) after they have known and acknowledg'd this Religion; for that if they forfeit or renounce their Interest in this Sacrifice there is never to be any other. Many whom the Law with its Sacrifices could not convert, or save, the Gospel does save by more effectual Means: But there is not to be expected, for the recovery of those who renounce the Terms of the Gospel, another more effectual Gospel, or more valuable Sacrifice. He does indeed say, that without this Sacrifice there is nothing left for them to expect but a fearful looking for of Judgment, &c. but not that all Apostates are utterly excluded from a possibility of having an Interest in this Sacrifice by Repentance. See *Dr. Wall's Critical Notes.* Some melancholy Persons have grounded their Despair upon *Heb. xii. 15, 16, 17.* 'Looking diligently, lest any Man fail of the Grace of God; lest any Root of Bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defil'd: Lest there be any Fornicator or profane Person, as Esau, who for one morsel of Meat sold his Birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the Blessing, he was rejected; for he found no Place for Repentance tho' he sought it carefully with Tears.' But, as the above-mentioned acute Observer remarks, this Passage has been strangely mis-applied by a Mistake of one Word, which changes the whole Sense. Repentance, or Change of Mind, does not relate to Esau, but to his Father, who could not be prevail'd on to reverse the Blessing which he had given to his Brother, tho' he did grant Esau a favourable Answer; he bless'd him al-

so,

So, tho' he did not give him the *principal* Blessing. The *Sin unto Death*, mention'd by St. John i. c. v. v. 16. and the *Sin against the Holy Ghost*, Mark iii. 28, &c. have given great Disquiet to several Persons. But Commentators are not agreed in their Explanations of these Passages, either as to the *Sin*, or the *Punishment*. The former of these is the most obscure, but even the latter has divided the Sentiments of the most learned and judicious Divines. Not to mention any other, *Gratius*, *Hammond*, and *Whitby*, all explain the Text differently: And I would appeal to any Person of common Sense whether it be reasonable, upon the Authority of Texts in whose Sense the most able Interpreters are not agreed, to conclude themselves in a State of unalterable Destruction, and to decline all Attempts to rescue themselves out of it.

I thought it would be a Satisfaction to many Persons to have some Account given of these Passages which have so often been the Subject of Controversy, and the occasion of Uneasiness. But whatever may be the true Sense of them, or any other the like Texts, this I am absolutely certain of, that not one, or all of them together can prove that ALL wilful and habitual Sinners, or apostate Christians are incapable of Repentance; and that for this short and plain Reason, because many such have actually repented. I suppose no body will deny the Fact, or the Consequence. But that none may take too much Encouragement from the Possibility of Repentance in such Circumstances, I must remind them of the great Difficulty of it, and how few Instances we have of such Penitents; unless you will call that Conviction Repentance, which only makes them tremble and despair at the Approach of Death.

As to the Generality of those who disquiet themselves with Apprehensions of their being in a State of Reprobation, a careful Perusal of what I have offer'd will, I hope, fully convince them that they are in no such forlorn Condition. And that they may be the better able to make a right Judgment of themselves I would advise them not to take their Estimate from their present Sentiments

timents and Disposition. If they try themselves by what they think and feel in the time of their Melancholy they will certainly pass a Sentence of Condemnation; because their Fears will be the only Witnesses that will be heard, and their mistaken Opinions their Judge. But let them look back to their State *immediately preceding* their Melancholy, and compare that with the true Notion of *Reprobation*. Were they utterly void of all Religious Sentiments and Dispositions, determin'd Enemies to God and Virtue, without any Love and Veneration for either, *before* they fell into those desponding Thoughts? They cannot with any Truth bear such a Testimony against their *past*, and consequently they cannot with any Shadow of Reason make such a Judgment, as they do, of their *present* Condition. As they had not *before* wholly forsaken GOD, why shou'd they think that God has *now* wholly forsaken *them*? His Holy Word assures us that he will not, and his Nature assures us that his Word cannot fail. But (to use the apposite Words of Bishop Bull) 'Where we see Instances of this Kind, of good People in this miserable State, much of their Misery is to be attributed to an Excess of Melancholy in their Natural Temper and Constitution, and much (*as it has happen'd here of late*) to the false Notions of Religion, which they have imbib'd and suck'd in from those unlicens'd, unlearned, and ignorant Teachers, which perhaps through their own Wantonness and Folly they have made choice of;' I will add, for no other Reason but because these *forward Itinerants* have Self-conceit and Vanity enough to commend themselves beyond all Bounds of common Modesty, and take the Freedom to censure all the Regular Establish'd Clergy with as little Truth and Charity. I pray God to reduce such *Pharisaical Boasters* to a more humble Opinion of their own Endowments and Perfections, which will teach them to behave in a more decent and orderly Manner; to give their Followers more Prudence than to think bold Pretences a sufficient Proof of their having the *Spirit* and uncharitable Censures an Argument of a more

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pious and saintlike Temper. If they throw themselves out of the regular Methods of Instruction and Means of Grace, appointed for them by the Course of God's Providence, by leaving their *Parish Churches* and *proper Pastors* to follow Irregular Guides, it can be no wonder to thinking Persons if some of them should be permitted to fall into *Delusions*, not only as a just Punishment, but as the natural Consequence of their idle Curiosity, and senseless Credulity.

Yours, &c.

FINIS.

